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My lady's dress:a play in three acts,



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MY LADY'S DRESS



VOLUME XI

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MY LADY'S DRESS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY
EDWARD KNOBLAUCH



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1916

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EDWARD KNOBLAUCH

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To
MAY AND DENNIS EADIE
Friends

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INTRODUCTION

All plays may be easily divided into two classes: those that deal with recognizable human nature and those that have only to do with theatrical puppets and conventional dramatic motives. Despite a belief to the contrary, this classification is comparatively novel to our modern theatre; as it is only within the last few years that we have had plays capable of being considered as candidates—of even the “also ran” class—for the first group; and, in number, they are still relatively few.

Year after year, season after season, our playwrights have written and rewritten on the same old models; based—for a considerable period of years—upon the “well-made” play. Even the Ibsen influence, when it began to revolutionize the drama, added more to our technical appreciation of theatre conventions, and the conveniences of the stage, than any new and great feeling for the realities of human nature. While his plays dealt with big human crises and he employed characters composed

of both good and bad traits, as people have in real life—they nevertheless remained puppets of the theatre—although they were larger, bigger puppets, better adapted to a theatre more modern and an audience more sophisticated than had existed theretofore. And yet these plays introduced a new era in our theatre that meant the beginning of the end for the old French régime.

As yet we find few real human characters on our stages—but, nevertheless, we *do* find them there, now one, now another; sometimes a small group of two or three; just about often enough to realize their existence has become an accomplished—if occasional—fact. Still more frequently we find a character curiously—and most illogically—compounded of both humanity and theatrical convention. “Oh, well,” we think, “the better part was provided by the author; the other was perhaps arbitrarily grafted upon it by producer or manager in accepting or rehearsing the piece!” Some such process as this could account for the true and human moments of “Young America”; all too quickly spoiled by obvious strivings for “theatrical suspense” and “dramatic interest” as those damning terms are now understood on the stage and in the classroom of to-day.

Formerly the characters upon our stages were all mere theatrical conventions. They had no more flesh-and-blood existence than Henry Esmond. Exactly like him, they existed only as they were seen (through the playwright's mind's eye) by the other characters in his story, or as they were needed to develop those "situations" that had been previously planned—and so they necessarily lacked all human interest of appeal. "Way Down East"—for instance—may deal with "real" incidents of farm life; but its characters are the veriest set of unstuffed theatrical puppets that ever moved about upon a theatre's boards. No real life blood is in them—nor ever can be. But recently the new spirit that has begun to be felt in our playhouses is indicating, more and more definitely, that the modern dramatist is better concerned with development of character than with the mere architectural construction and theoretic framework of his story. Real human beings are at last being demanded upon our stages. We are even becoming willing to pay our money to see them in real situations, confronting problems allied to real life, more readily than to support a group of theatrical abstractions stalking through a conventional, sandpapered, theatrical plot.

This must eventually result in another revolution of no slight extent. It means a new technic for our playwrights to master, perhaps more difficult than any they have had to learn heretofore. In the past they had only to understand the resources of the theatre and become acquainted with its well-used and hackneyed methods of projecting its artificial personages and plots "across" the footlights. Some part of that work will remain to be done; but after *that* has been accomplished, the young dramatist must study to make his characters appear human and real, even within their necessarily artificial and theatrically conventional surroundings. They must be adapted only enough to be appropriately related to their background—itself composed of theatrical conventions, no matter how "realistic" it may be—while still retaining enough of truth of character to appear real and human to their auditors. This can—and must—be accomplished, without requiring them to be compounded of all the dramatic conventions as well! And so it is we find ourselves, at this end of the year 1915, actually participating in the very process of introducing a "new" element into the theatre.

While not entirely a new problem in the theatre,

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we are only beginning to realize for ourselves that in that way lies our next direction of progress, and to suspect that that way also lies a new public with latent interest waiting to be wakened for this type of coming drama. This drama may lie only just over the edge of the horizon; but it must be tested — and its new audiences developed—by practical experiment, conducted not only in our “little” theatres, or before unnatural “invited,” “subscription,” or “society” audiences, but proved in the real or “commercial” theatre itself, always the democratic play-house of the masses.

A most encouraging evidence of dramatic vitality exists, therefore, in the fact that, despite the inherent conservatism of our controlling theatre managers, there are occasionally produced upon their many stages a few important experiments with new dramatic forms; at least one or two occurring in every dramatic season. And while, as a rule, we expect hardly more than one of these experiments from any one dramatist, we are indebted to Mr. Knoblauch for at least two (and, possibly, more) of these novelties in no more than as many years—a record unusual enough, particularly in the theatre, where since time immemorial more attention has been

directed toward imitating the play that has made the latest popular hit than in striking out and discovering new fields of success.

Mr. Knoblauch is by birth an American—though often regarded as English from his long residence abroad. He was, nevertheless, born in New York City, the date being April 7, 1874, and after graduating from college, he went immediately abroad, where he has since resided, either on the Continent or in England. His first play to be given in America was “*The Shulamite*,” presented by Miss Lena Ashwell during one of her tours. Next came “*The Cottage in the Air*,” one of the few plays by an American produced during our short-lived “*New Theatre*” venture. A light and charming little romance, it demanded, however—more than any other of the plays produced in the gorgeous distances of that great auditorium—a simpler and more intimate environment, where the piece’s delicate texture might have been enough appreciated to have assured it an artistic success.

“*The Faun*” was, therefore, the first play to bring Mr. Knoblauch into prominence. It was produced by Mr. Faversham in 1911, played by him all through one season, and—if memory serves—at

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least a portion of another. This play won a well-deserved success, partly from its novel idea, partaking even somewhat of the nature of social satire, and trenching the borders of the modern comedy of manners, a most difficult vein and one that has rarely been successfully worked; about the best recent example being Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's "Mary Goes First."

The following year Mr. Knöblauch made a daring experiment at dramatizing in "Kismet" the atmospheric essence and romantic illusion of "The Arabian Nights," an experiment that proved far more successful than the *cognoscenti* deemed possible when first they heard it was to be tried. Then came "Milestones," in collaboration with Arnold Bennett; then two plays little known in this country: "Discovering America" and "The Head Master"; next "My Lady's Dress," and finally—near the end of the season 1914–1915—"Marie Odile," an attempt at romanticizing a war incident that, localized in so modern and realistic a *milieu*, was difficult to make convincing, either as miracle or romance.

It is either a curious coincidence, or the definite expression of an alert, wide-aware, and venturesome personal outlook, that makes the same author re-

sponsible for two such differently novel types of theatrical entertainment as "My Lady's Dress" and "Milestones"—setting both "The Faun" and "Kismet" aside as expressing the same tendencies somewhat less importantly. In "Milestones" the authors dared to repeat substantially the same sequence of events in three successive acts, each act portraying the conflict between conservatism and youth, as it duplicated itself in three succeeding generations in the same family, a new set of characters appearing in each scene, linked together by family relationship and by the youngsters of the first generation becoming gradually the older and conservative characters of the third—an idea interesting in thesis and obviously provocative of new difficulties in its dramatic working out.

Judging from the theme, and even more from the development, of this and others of his plays, Mr. Knoblauch seems to possess two clearly marked *flares*: one toward romanticism, the other toward the study—or, at least, the observation—of social conditions. "My Lady's Dress" certainly possesses novel value in the theatre as a social document. Whether or not that interest was intended by the author in the first instance, it is clearly evident

in the finished product. More than that, Mr. Knoblauch would seem to have also struck upon a theme of unusual feminine appeal, and it is supposed that the dramatist's failure or success in the theatre depends upon his appeal to the feminine portion of his audience, which we are told comprises between 60 and 75 per cent. of the American theatre-going public!

"My Lady's Dress," first produced in England, at the Royal Theatre in London, April 21, 1911, and, in New York, at the Playhouse, on October 10th of the same year, possesses many points of peculiar interest to any student of contemporary drama. One of these was its author's recognition and adoption of a modern continental mannerism for unifying his stage pictures. While this interest was merely incidental, it is nevertheless to be regretted that—in the American production, at least—no attempt was made to realize these suggestive stage directions. In another instance, where concerned with the construction and arrangement of the material utilized for the piece, it is essentially fundamental. Mr. Knoblauch has here provided us with an unusual and interesting experiment in modern dramatic technique, for "My Lady's Dress" also belongs to the somewhat small group of plays comprising "a

play within a play," or, rather, in this particular case, *several* plays within a play!

Mr. Knoblauch has actually undertaken to adapt to the conventions of our stage a drama requiring expression in nine separate and distinct scenes (it is unimportant that he has arbitrarily chosen to subdivide these scenes into the usual act groups indicated by the program), nearly all requiring different sets of characters, located in different places, and occurring at different periods. The piece is essentially a drama in nine scenes, nearly every one so completely self-contained as to be available for separate presentation as a one-act piece.

Taking these varied scenes, the author has woven them together by two altogether different means: in the first place, he has used a short prelude to introduce the general subject of his play—an elaborate gown that it is hinted may have a particular effect upon the relations of a husband and wife, and even perhaps exert a deciding influence upon their future fortunes as well. Mr. Knoblauch has handled this theme so as not only to introduce an element of real and sustained suspense, but he has even succeeded in attaching a certain symbolic value to the dress that helps greatly in making his

subject appear of more than mere trivial importance.

Beginning at this point and employing the somewhat hackneyed theoretic retrospective mechanism of the "dream" play, he develops the main portion of his drama, concerned with the materials and making of this dress. So the second scene becomes an incident connected with the silk culture from which the dress was made; the third scene is concerned with its weaving; the fourth relates to the manufacture of its lace trimming; the fifth to the making of its artificial flowers, and the sixth portrays an incident of the fur trade. In sequence these scenes bear no relation to chronology of time. Some, as in the third scene, take place in the present, while others, as in the lace scene, dated at 1650, are more remote. They further maintain no consistency in regard to place: they jump from Italy to France, to Holland, London, and to Siberia.

In the third act the scenes are knit more closely together, the author evidently feeling the necessity both for "speeding up" the interest and strengthening the dramatic climax toward which his previous scenes have, by now, obviously begun to converge. The first scene of the last act (the seventh in the

play) is the most complex, introducing the dreaming wife herself in some of the actual happenings as well as some imaginary incidents concerned with making the dress referred to by her in the opening scene; finally showing its exhibition and her purchase of it in the dressmaker's shop on Bond Street just previous to the opening of the play. Thus, for the first time, the actual characters reappear, now shown side by side with the imaginary, while the eighth incident is so closely connected with the preceding scene as to show the happenings taking place on the other side of the very curtain in front of which the dressmaker's mannikins had posed and postured during the scene before. A portion of this scene, along with a part of the ninth, is supposed—in moving-picture parlance—to "throw back" in order to depict different incidents of actually simultaneous occurrence.

The last scene of all draws these scattered strands together, completing both dress and play. Reverting to the opening scene, it picks up and completes the "outer story," showing the delivery of the dress for which the principal characters had been waiting, with Anne's awakening to the realization that she had dreamed the history of her gown and its making

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—so bringing her to comprehend the minor and major tragedies woven into its beautiful fabrics.

Besides his choice of subject and the later relation of these scenes to the making of this fashionable gown, the author has of intention so arranged his story as to use the two principal actors in all these various scenes, husband and wife reappearing in each little episode, generally under an easily recognized variant of their Christian names, modified only enough to conform with their different nationalities (or an appropriate diminutive): so Anne becomes Annette, Antje, Annie, Anna, or Anita in the one case, while John appears as Gioann, Joanny, Jonkheer, Jack, Ivan, Jacquelin, in the other.

This detail of handling, at least, is typically theatrical. The reader should also realize and allow for this factor, that—from its direct visual appeal to the eye of the spectator—would be a far more important element in *seeing* the drama in the theatre than in *reading* it in the printed page. It also appeals greatly to the actors, always allured by any opportunity to prove what they regard as their “versatility.” Indeed, this “protean” idea has been the real reason for being of several well-known and popular plays, notably “Dr. Jekyll and

Mr. Hyde" and "The Corsican Brothers." With this treatment in mind, the author has managed most cleverly to aid his actors by providing them such radically different settings, and opportunities to wear such different types of costumes—as well as portray such boldly characterized and different sorts of persons—as greatly to assist them in proving their versatility to the audience, in turn generally easily impressed with such theatrically apparent and obvious *tours-du-force* as the author has here chosen to employ.

To revert to Mr. Knoblauch's suggested treatment of the settings: most popular among the conventions or "mannerisms" of the so-called modern stagecraft of Germany has been a modernized version of the "forestage," so devised as to remain a permanent part of all the various scenes shown in a series of stage pictures. By this means it was necessary to change only a comparatively small section of the stage—the upper and centre portion—to adapt each setting to the new requirements for "action" or "business" of a series of quickly recurring scenes (in one case only did Mr. Knoblauch require an exterior) and, in the last act, this permanently standing archway or "inner proscenium" made an arrangement peculiarly suited to the stage manage-

ment the author had carefully planned. This stage arrangement was originally devised to serve two purposes: one to help more deeply "frame" the inner picture; the other to simplify quick changes of stage settings—as from the full-stage set in the first scene to those dream scenes that followed it—as well as to provide opportunity for a particular kind of new and effective overhead lighting. It was undoubtedly a recognition of its value for these two latter considerations, as well as to help group his scenes into the act divisions he had adopted, that caused Mr. Knoblauch in his stage directions to call for the front portion, or "forestage" section, of his scene to remain the same throughout the play. It is equally characteristic of our obtuse and old-fashioned managerial system that the opportunity suggested by the author was disregarded here in America; and the producer allowed to handle these scenes in the old conventional way!

To that rapidly growing group interested in the modern pageant Mr. Knoblauch's treatment of this play also offers many curious and most instructive parallels. Likewise composed of a series of scenes devolving from or bound together by some central idea, the scheme of development of the pageant

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equally depends upon a succession of incidents generally unrelated and—when historical in scheme—arranged in chronological sequence. The modern pageant is further adapted to presentation out of doors; and therefore the author has so to develop his story as to obtain his effects more naturally than when devising his drama for performance on a theatre stage. Thus Mr. Knoblauch, in writing for the regular theatre, can make use of the sort of dramatic tableau climax requiring a “quick curtain” to be effective, a treatment impossible in the open pageant field. He also benefits by availing himself of all the customary machinery arranged by centuries of custom to interpose between the dramatist and his audience, and to help enclose his stage and actors; all designed to assist in making his story *theatrically* effective. This paraphernalia being entirely lacking on the pageant field, the pageant writer has to provide—by means of an entirely new set of technical conditions—a more or less effective, and radically different, kind of substitute.

The pageant writer, however, will find much to interest and instruct him in Mr. Knoblauch’s *theatrical* arrangement of his scenes; and even perhaps Mr. Knoblauch may end by unconsciously

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influencing the pageant form by the way he has developed his story. Each of his scenes is a clear, closely knit telling of an episode of his story; which episode, while complete in itself, nevertheless gathers interest and increases in effectiveness of appeal *because* of its relation to the other episodes that precede and follow it. Each scene is carefully jointed into the whole. Each is kept carefully under control by the dramatist. Especially is this true during the first two acts. So each scene deals with a carefully varied element or character; the second scene with vanity and revenge; the third with self-sacrifice; the fourth a cleverly modified trick of comedy; the fifth self-sacrifice again; the sixth a somewhat elemental version of the eternal triangle. And so the interest is carefully sustained and strengthened until the third act, when, with a novel and very much up-to-the-moment setting, containing all the appeal appropriately possible from a display of intimate personal feminine garniture (without which, nowadays, no dramatic piece aimed to interest the feminine portion of the audience can be successfully attempted), with a rather bewildering emphasis suddenly placed upon a number of characters (quite after the pageant fashion,

by the way!), the dramatist brings the piece swiftly to its biggest theatrical moment—the murder of the dressmaker by his mannikin, a murder that one feels, as a matter of fact, has hardly been given a sufficiently well-developed motive, and therefore introduces what is perhaps a weakness in the logic of the piece, unfortunately occurring at that particular moment when the greatest care was necessary to provide the critical feminine spectator with a thoroughly convincing and readily acceptable motive for this impulsive act.

In its present theoretic form “My Lady’s Dress” is of course no more a true pageant than “Joseph and His Brethren,” or any other episodic commercial treatment *in the theatre* of material covering large scope, or of great historical extent. It is, indeed, as a matter of fact, quite as successfully adapted to the theatre as any play developing consistently around a more conventional plot. In its development Mr. Knoblauch has proved himself far more of a trained craftsman in the theatre than in some of his other plays, for he has not missed a single point in making his series of little dramas adapted to effective performance, *in the theatre*—nor has he once failed to avail himself of all the technical ad-

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vantages possible in placing these little dramas upon a professional stage. Indeed, Mr. Knoblauch's one failure—if “failure” it is properly to be called—comes from his placing so much dependence at a critical point upon this theatrical instinct, through which he has perhaps failed sufficiently to prepare the way for his final dramatic—some may choose to call it his “melodramatic”—moment; and therefore some in his audiences have felt this moment to have been arbitrarily introduced without sufficient reason from the development of the story, or motivation otherwise provided from the characters to excuse or naturally produce it. The last scene, too, lacks perhaps a little in its psychological feminine appeal, and for similar reasons. Probably too many women in the audience are likely to acknowledge—to themselves, at least!—their personal inability to have made the sacrifice the drama here demands. Their feminine intuition is at loggerheads with Mr. Knoblauch's quite proper theoretic deduction: they realize too clearly that *they* themselves could not have given up so easily the dramatic opportunity of appearing in so particularly fetching a costume—and a situation—as the dramatist has so carefully built up during the evening before their very eyes. Can it

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be that the author has, at the very end, failed to realize—or realizing, to solve—the problem of conflicting interests that he has himself evolved? That perhaps his knowledge of the theatre and his feeling for dramatic possibilities have blinded him for the moment to those intuitive deductions of human feminine psychology in which so many of his auditors would be better skilled than he; and so—by taking the wrong turning—he may have lost what would otherwise seem to be a play superbly adapted to gaining—and maintaining—the feminine interest to the full! Perhaps the logical feminine dramatic climax would have been the final scene—that Mr. Knoblauch did *not* write—of Anne appearing in this wonderfully expounded gown and making conquest of both husband and admirer, both John and Sir Charles! There could then have been no doubt as to the final future of the married pair left in the mind of any gentle spectator. Would this have been the ideally feminine “happy ending?” Being, after all, but mere men, we can only propound the sphinxlike question. It still remains, concealed between these covers as definitely as behind the stage curtain, for all feminine readers to find and answer!

FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN.

Boston, December 1915.

CAST OF THE PLAY

Produced under the direction of Messrs. Vedrenne and Eadie, at the Royalty Theatre, London, April 21, 1914.

ACT I—THE MATERIAL

<i>Scene 1</i>	<i>Anne's Boudoir</i>
<i>John</i>	MR. DENNIS EADIE
<i>Anne</i>	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Léonie</i>	MISS JANET ROSS

<i>Scene 2</i>	<i>A Peasant's House, Italy</i>
<i>Peo</i>	MR. EDMUND GOULDING
<i>Nina</i>	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>La Grisa</i>	MISS BERYL MERCER
<i>Gioann</i>	MR. DENNIS EADIE

<i>Scene 3</i>	<i>A Workroom, Lyons, France</i>
<i>Nicolas</i>	MR. CAMPBELL GULLAN
<i>Annette</i>	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Père Simon</i>	MR. ARTHUR BAXENDELL
<i>Joanny</i>	MR. DENNIS EADIE
<i>Rondier</i>	MR. DORIAN FISHER

ACT II—THE TRIMMING

<i>Scene 1</i>	<i>A Garden, Holland, 1650</i>
<i>Antje</i>	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Moeder Kaatje</i>	MISS EDITH EVANS
<i>Mynheer Cornelis</i>	MR. EDMUND MAURICE
<i>Jonkheer Ian Van der Bom</i>	MR. DENNIS EADIE

<i>Scene 2</i>	<i>A Room, Whitechapel, London</i>
<i>Annie</i>	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Mrs. Moss</i>	MISS BERYL MERCER
<i>Liza</i>	MISS LYNN FONTANNE
<i>Jack</i>	MR. DENNIS EADIE

Scene 3

A Trapper's Stockade, Siberia

<i>Louka</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. EDMUND GOULDING
<i>Yermak</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DORIAN FISHER
<i>Anna</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Ivan</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DENNIS EADIE

ACT III—THE MAKING

Scene 1

"Jacquelin's," New Bond Street

<i>Anne</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Sir Charles</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. EDMUND MAURICE
<i>Mrs. Collisson</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS LYNN FONTANNE
<i>Lady Appleby</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS ELIZABETH KIRBY
<i>Hon. Peter Withers</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DAVID DARRELL
<i>Miss Sylvia</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	{ MISS EDITH EVANS
<i>Miss Madeleine</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	{ MISS ADELA WEEKES
<i>A Fitter</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS WILMA LEYMAN
<i>Messaline</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS BARNETT
<i>Trottinette</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS MARJORIE HUME
<i>Psyche</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS WINIFRED ELLICE
<i>Rosamund</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS BARBARA NEVILLE
<i>Jacquelin</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DENNIS EADIE
<i>Buttons</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. EDWARD AYRES
<i>Anita</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS COOPER

Scene 2

The other side of the Curtain

<i>Jacquelin</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DENNIS EADIE
<i>Anita</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Messaline</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS BARNETT
<i>Trottinette</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS MARJORIE HUME
<i>Psyche</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS WINIFRED ELLICE
<i>Rosamund</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS BARBARA NEVILLE
<i>Miss Sylvia</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS EDITH EVANS

Scene 3

Anne's Boudoir

<i>Anne</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS GLADYS COOPER
<i>Léonie</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MISS JANET ROSS
<i>John</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	MR. DENNIS EADIE

The Play produced by Frank Vernon

Act I



ACT I

SCENE I: *A boudoir [right and left from the point of view of the actor]. The room is furnished very daintily in the bright colors of modern taste. It is cut in half from right to left by an arch. Below the arch, right and left, doors, the right one being the entrance door to the room, the left one leading to the bathroom. Beyond the arch right there is a fireplace. To the left a dressing-table with a looking-glass lighted by candles on either side. A couch stands obliquely before the fire. One or two chairs and a little table with a shaded lamp; also a telephone. The fire is burning brightly. It is about 6.30 of an afternoon.*

Before the dressing-table, adjusting a loose gown, sits ANNE, a charming woman of twenty-five. Near-by stands the French maid, LÉONIE. She has a dress over her arm and a pair of shoes in her hand, as if to put them away.

LÉONIE. Madame désire-t-elle autre chose?

ANNE. No, Léonie, I think not. [She surveys

herself critically in the glass.] I look a fright. A perfect fright! And to-night of all nights!

LÉONIE. Madame mistake 'erself! Madame est belle comme un ange! Comme toujours.

ANNE. An angel with a racking headache, if you like, Léonie! I've done far too much to-day—as usual. Oh, London! London! What's the time?

LÉONIE [*looking at a clock on the little table*]. Just half-past six—

ANNE. I've got an hour—thank heaven! Get me one of my headache powders, will you? I'll lie down.

LÉONIE. Bien, Madame. [*She moves to the door left.*] What dress will madame put on to-night?

ANNE. The new dress. The one they've just sent home.

LÉONIE. There is no dress, Madame, just sent home.

ANNE. No dress? You're positive?

LÉONIE. Mais positive, mais positive, Madame.

ANNE. Oh, these dressmakers! Devils all! Devils! [*She goes over to the telephone.*] Is that you, Baker? Get me Jacquelin's, will you? At once, Baker. Mr. Jacquelin himself. [*She hangs up the*

receiver.] If I don't have that dress to-night, I'll—oh, my head! Fetch that powder, Léonie—please.

LÉONIE. Bien, Madame.

[*She goes off by the door left.*

ANNE. I simply must have that dress. Or I'll— [The telephone rings. Taking off the receiver.] Is that Jacquelin's? Mr. Jacquelin himself? He's not well? Nonsense. He was quite well half an hour ago when I was at the shop. Oh, gone out? Who's that? Miss Sylvia, is it? Yes. Yes. It's I that's speaking. Where is that dress of mine? It was quite ready. Mr. Jacquelin promised to send it at once. On the way, you say? You've actually sent it?

[*The door right opens and JOHN enters, silently.*

He is a distinguished-looking man of forty; wears an ordinary lounge suit. He comes up behind ANNE, leans over her shoulder, and gives her a kiss.]

ANNE. Oh, John, don't, don't be so naughty—[*Into the telephone.*] No! Nothing. Somebody must have cut in. [*In a whisper to him.*] Look what you've made me do! [*Into the telephone.*] Well, if it isn't here in half an hour! Half an hour, remember! I'll never, never come to Jacquelin's

again, Miss Sylvia! Never. [She hangs up the telephone. To JOHN.] The brutes! I absolutely depend on them for to-night!

JOHN. Wear anything, my darling. You always look far lovelier than all the others put together.

ANNE [*laying her hand over his mouth*]. Now don't, John. Be serious! You know how much to-night means to both of us! And if I don't look better than my best and make idiotic eyes at old Sir Charles —

JOHN [*annoyed*]. Anne!

ANNE [*with a little laugh*]. Ha! Was it jealous?

JOHN [*savagely*]. You know I hate it.

ANNE [*coaxing*]. Don't be an old silly. Come! I'll lie down here, because I'm more or less dead, and you shall sit there and tell me just how furious you are with your dear little corpse of a wife. [She throws herself on the couch. JOHN sits down on the couch rather sulkily.]

ANNE. Well?

[JOHN looks at her a moment, then smiles and kisses her tenderly.]

There! That's a bit better.

JOHN. I can't help it, Anne. I can't bear to see you play with old Sir Charles the way you

did the other night: smiling and making love to him.

ANNE. Love! Pooh! That isn't love!

JOHN. I don't care what it is. I know I'm terribly old-fashioned and bourgeois and middle class. Not at all like most men nowadays. But then most men haven't—[with a smile]—a wife like mine, you see.

ANNE. You dear, old darling! I adore getting you into a rage just so as to hear you say the same sweet old things all over again. I do really. Only—[she taps the tip of his nose with her finger]—you—must—be—sensible—sometimes.

JOHN. Sensible! I am sensible!

ANNE. Are you? Why do you suppose I make love, as you call it, to pompous old Sir Charles? D'you think it amuses me, except in so far as it amuses any woman to make an utter ass of a man? You know we've got to get him to help us! You'll never get that post without his influence.

JOHN. Oh, post!

ANNE. It doesn't matter how much you deserve it. If Sir Charles won't put in the right word at the right moment—

[LÉONIE reënters with a glass of water with a powder in it.]

LÉONIE. Madame, le cachet.

ANNE [to LÉONIE]. Give it to me. And go down-stairs and let me know the instant the dress arrives. They say it's on the way. Of course, I don't believe a word of it.

LÉONIE. Bien, Madame.

[*She goes off by the door right.*

JOHN [*seeing the glass*]. What's that?

ANNE. Only a powder. I have rather a head.

JOHN. Have you, dear? Perhaps you'd better not go to-night.

ANNE. I'll be all right when I've slept. These new powders are wonderful. They pop me into a trance, I have the most glorious dreams, and in half an hour I'm awake and ready to go on all night.

JOHN. I don't like you taking this strong stuff. Do let me telephone Sir Charles and say we can't come to dinner.

ANNE. My darling John, you must be slightly deranged.

JOHN. Why?

ANNE. Not go to-night—when I know the Collissons are to be there, too? They're after the same post, let me tell you. I know they are. There never was a meaner, more calculating cat than that wife

of his, with her sly pose of being a chronic invalid. And if I don't cut in ahead of her——

JOHN. It makes me sick, this whole business. Years of sweating simply count for nothing—absolutely nothing—compared to this after-dinner game.

ANNE [*flippantly*]. Oh, during dinner, too, my dear. And before! And in between times, too, for that matter. To tell you the truth, John—I've just been having tea with Sir Charles.

JOHN. You haven't!

ANNE. Yes. At the Club. And then I took him round to Jacquelin's and showed him the dress I was going to wear to-night. "In his honor" I told him, of course. You should have seen him puff up, just like an old turkey cock! Ha! Ha!

JOHN. It's disgusting!

ANNE. All for you, John! All for you!

JOHN [*fiercely*]. Sometimes I could hate you, Anne! To think of all the low-down duplicity in a wife's heart when she really loves her husband.

ANNE [*earnestly*]. And sometimes I could hate you, John. To think of the idiotic jealousy in a husband's heart when he really loves his wife.

JOHN. Anne, don't let's go to-night.

ANNE. My darling! How long have we been married?

JOHN. I don't know. Always.

ANNE. Six years, nearly. And I've presented you with two strapping children—and it's all been an absurd success, hasn't it? And yet, every now and then, you're just like some primitive cave man slashing about his flint knife in defence of his female. And you know nowadays we're supposed—supposed to be overcivilized.

JOHN [*fiercely*]. Well, I'm not, for one, thank God.

ANNE. No. You certainly are not. [*Putting her hands on his shoulders and looking into his eyes.*] And I wonder if I'd love you half so well if you weren't a bit of a cave man—occasionally.

JOHN. And I wonder, if you weren't a bit of—
of—

ANNE. Call it Sphinx, John. It's a far prettier name than fraud, isn't it?

JOHN [*embracing her tenderly*]. Oh, my dear! If I didn't love you so, perhaps I shouldn't mind it all —this miserable low-down scrambling after a position which—

ANNE. Which you deserve more than any one in England.

JOHN. Even if I do deserve it—is it worth grubbing for in the mud?

ANNE. You always exaggerate so.

JOHN. Anne! Listen to me. Let me call up Sir Charles and say you're worn out. No, listen! And then I'll put on my smoking suit, and you stop in this lovely fluffy gown of yours! And we'll have Baker bring up the dinner here on a little table, before the fire, and we'll——

LÉONIE *reënters by the door right with a box.*

LÉONIE. Voilà la robe, Madame.

ANNE. Ah!

JOHN. Oh, damn!

ANNE. Just take it out of the box, Léonie.

LÉONIE. Bien, Madame.

ANNE. Wait till I show it you. And then see if you don't want me to wear it to-night and wipe out that Collisson creature once and for all.

[LÉONIE produces a gorgeous shimmering gown.

It is trimmed with a touch of sable and a beautiful golden tinsel rose. Somewhere round the shoulders winds a piece of old Mechlin.]

Hold it up, Léonie. There! Now, my dear! Now what do you say?

JOHN [*querulously*]. Is that supposed to be a dress?

ANNE. I wonder why men always affect such utter ignorance in women's clothes? Do they think it adds to their manliness? [To LÉONIE.] Bring it over here! Look! Do you see that material? There's not another piece like it in all London. Mr. Jacquelin told me so himself. It's hand woven. He got it direct from Lyons. Absolutely unique.

JOHN [*feeling it, grumpily*]. Very unique.

ANNE. And that fur is real Russian sable, my dear.

JOHN. Yes. Shot in some rabbit pen, most likely.

ANNE. And the rose. Paris.

JOHN. East end, you mean.

ANNE. East end, indeed! And look at the lace. A genuine bit of Venetian—over three hundred years old, if not more. And uncut. I can always use it again.

JOHN. I wonder why women always say that? And then have boxes and boxes full of rubbish they never do use again.

ANNE [*with a superior look at him*]. Take the dress, Léonie. Monsieur doesn't appreciate beautiful things to-day.

LÉONIE. Monsieur will apprécier her toute à l'heure, quand madame la mettra. [LÉONIE spreads the gown over a chair by the dressing-table.]

JOHN. All I appreciate to-day is that it's a ridiculous mess of odds and ends which has probably cost a perfectly heathenish sum of money.

ANNE. Not at all, my dear! Absurdly cheap—for what it is.

JOHN. What do you consider cheap?

ANNE [lightly]. Fifty-five guineas. That's all.

JOHN [rising]. Fifty-five guineas? Fifty-five, you say?

ANNE. John! Do remember my poor head!

JOHN. Your poor head! Your poor head! And what about my poor pocket?

ANNE [with a reproachful look, indicating LÉONIE]. Léonie! Take these things and get my bath ready for seven.

LÉONIE. Bien, Madame.

ANNE. That's all for the present.

[LÉONIE goes off by the door left with the box the dress came in.]

John! Before Léonie, too! In all our married life you've never done such a thing.

JOHN. I can't help it. It's perfectly outrageous!

Only last week I asked you to be a little careful. You seem to forget. We've got two children. They're growing up. They've got to be educated.

ANNE. That's precisely why I want you to have that post.

JOHN. Yes—but fifty-five guineas!

ANNE. I tell you it's cheap as dresses go nowadays. You as a man interested in socialism, you ought to realize that.

JOHN. What, in Heaven's name, has socialism to do with the price of a dress?

ANNE. Everything! Just think for a moment of all the work that goes to make up a dress! All the poor people.

JOHN. Oh, you call that socialism?

ANNE. Of course I do. Poor people that work and are underpaid—that's socialism, isn't it? I was reading about it only the other day in some paper. All about the cocoons.

JOHN. The cocoons?

ANNE. Yes, the awful trouble the peasants have in breeding the silkworms. They aren't only bred in China—but in Italy as well it seems. And then the silk has to be spun and woven.

JOHN [*sarcastically*]. At Lyons.

ANNE. Precisely. At Lyons. And then the fur and the trimmings and the lace—

JOHN [*as before*]. That you can always use over again—

ANNE [*ignoring his tone*]. Not to mention the making up of the material, the choosing, and designing, and combining. Really, come to think of it, you and I, if we had to do it all ourselves—

JOHN. But it's not our business—

ANNE. I'm only saying—if we had to do it all ourselves—we wouldn't begin to touch it for twice the sum. So you see fifty-five's really nothing for a dress—really.

JOHN. Particularly when a man's wife wants it in order to show as much as possible of herself to a fat, old, influential man. So that her husband can get on in the world, and she can get more dresses to show herself to other fat, old, influential men; and so on, and so on, and so on.

ANNE [*snapping*]. You're perfectly vile! I've a good mind not to go at all.

JOHN. That's all I ask of you.

ANNE. And that's just why I *am going*. Even if I wanted to, I shouldn't stay at home now.

JOHN. I'm going to telephone we're not coming.

ANNE. Telephone what you like; I'm going.

JOHN. You wouldn't dare without me.

ANNE. Wouldn't I?

JOHN. You—— [*He fumbles with rage, controls himself, and says finally with infinite pity.*] You can't be feeling well, my poor dear.

ANNE. That's the lowest thing I've ever heard you say. Not feeling well indeed! And my head pounding like a thousand hammers. [*She drinks off her headache powder.*]

JOHN. Exactly.

ANNE [*gulpng*]. Exactly not—— Cave man! Please leave me, will you? Please. I've taken my powder. I want to lie down. [*She lies down on the couch, drawing a cover about her.*]

JOHN. Shall I tuck you up?

ANNE. Thank you, no. I don't allow cave men to tuck me up. They might stab me in the back while they're about it.

JOHN [*pleadingly*]. Anne!

ANNE [*dryly*]. No, thank you.

JOHN [*after a pause*]. Anne!

ANNE. No!

JOHN. Oh, very well, then—don't.

[*He goes off furiously by the door right.*

ANNE [turning round and making a face after him].
Beast! Beast! Sometimes you—— [She puts out
an arm and turns off the light. Only the firelight shines
upon her. The rest of the room is in darkness. ANNE
gives a stifled yawn then mumbles to herself.] Oh, Lord!
Cocoons—Silk—Sables—the East End—Cave man.
Yes—that's what he is—Cave man—Cocoons—— If
we had to do it all ourselves—— Fifty-five——

[The firelight fades away. The scene is left in
darkness.]

SCENE II: As the lights go up the room has changed.
All the furniture has disappeared. Only the front
part of the room, up to the arch, remains. This
“frame” stands for all the scenes.

Beyond the arch is seen the interior of a peasant's
house near the Lake of Como. In the centre at the
back are two windows which look out on a mountainous
district. All along the walls, between the windows
and beyond, run shelves about twenty inches
apart covered with mulberry leaves.

To the left there is apparently [out of sight] a fireplace.
Logs of wood are piled up by the arch. A
rough stool or two stand about as well as two or three
big baskets filled with leaves.

NOTE. *None of the following sets have anything but backgrounds—no “side pieces.” The scenes should be like pictures and extend apparently indefinitely left and right beyond their frame [the arch of the boudoir].*

Pronunciations in Scene: Peo like Payo; Masciadro like Mashadro; Gioann like Jo-an.

Peo [Pompeo], a simple peasant boy of twenty-three, is standing on a stool supplying the silkworms with fresh mulberry leaves. He is dressed in a shirt without a collar, and sleeves rolled up to his elbow—a pair of rough trousers turned up halfway to the knees, showing bare legs and feet. As he works he is singing lustily the popular song of “Tripoli.”

Outside the windows, from left to right, comes NINA. She passes the windows quickly and comes in from the right. She is a charming peasant girl of nineteen. The spectator realizes that she has the same features as ANNE of the boudoir—in fact is ANNE physically. She is dressed like the peasant women of the district: a short, thick, full skirt, an apron, a brilliant kerchief crosses on her breast. In her hair she wears the elaborate silver headdress of Northern Italy, and from her ears dangle a pair of large gold earrings.

NINA. Peo, my Peo!

[PEO comes down from the stool and embraces her. In doing so he upsets his basket of mulberry leaves.]

PEO. Nina!

NINA. Oh, the leaves!

PEO. Oh, let the leaves go! How beautiful you are, my Ninetta.

NINA. I've made myself beautiful for you.

PEO. I never knew you had a silver headdress. Where did you get it?

NINA [half anxiously]. Suppose some other man had given it to me?

PEO [breathless]. Nina! Nina! It's not true?

NINA [laughing]. There! Don't get jealous. I'm only teasing you. It belonged to my poor mother.

PEO. The kerchief, too? It seems quite new.

NINA [glibly]. Oh, yes, that, too. Both. [Quickly.] Have you seen the earrings, Peo? Who's the man that gave me those I wonder?

PEO [kissing her]. Don't tease me like that again. I'd kill anybody that looked at you.

NINA. As bad as that? But, Peo! Dearest! Why aren't you ready? We must go to the priest's

at once. Ten o'clock he said. And then to the Mayor, to fix the day and the hour.

PEO. Nina! To think that in a week we'll be married!

NINA. And living in the little farm up the mountain, with our own linen and our own kitchen and our own cow. For we'll have a cow as soon as we can, won't we, Peo?

PEO [*scratching his head*]. As soon as we can—yes. Only it takes a lot of money to marry, Nina. A whole sackful. These earrings alone mean three months' putting-by. And now with getting the little house! If it wasn't for the blessed silkworm—
[He begins to collect the scattered leaves.] Do you know what I've said to myself these five weeks watching and feeding them here—and sitting up nights with them to keep the rooms just at the right heat—"Only wait till you've spun. Wait till we've sold you! Nina's there! Nina's waiting for me!"

NINA [*laughing blissfully*]. Ha! Ha! And I've said the same thing hemming my last sheets and pillow cases, whenever my padrona would let me, that is. "Five weeks! And the crop's ours. The whole crop."

PEO. Yes. Think of my brother letting us have it all.

NINA. Oh, he's good, your brother. An angel.

PEO. You should have heard his wife last night when he confessed to her what he'd promised us. Such curses I never heard! Never!

NINA. Never mind. He's promised. And all this waiting, these long, long three years will be over at last—the Virgin be praised. [*They embrace again.*] And now quick, my Peo. Put on your coat and your boots. We must go.

PEO. But who's to watch the fire?

NINA. Where's your brother?

PEO. He sat up all last night watching it. He's sleeping.

NINA. And his wife?

PEO. Down at the market.

NINA. What are we to do? Time's going—and the priest waiting and my padrona won't let me off another morning this week. So if you don't go to-day— [*Breaking off as she looks out of the window.*] Oh! Grisa! Grisa! [*She raps on the window. Outside an old, gray-haired, wrinkled peasant woman is seen to pass. She carries a basket on her arm. She is dressed in very shabby clothes of the poorest kind.*]

NINA [*motioning to her through the window*]. Come in! Come in, Grisa! Come round and in. I want to speak to you.

[LA GRISA *nods and passing by the window to the right disappears.*]

Why shouldn't we get her to see to the fire? It'll only be for an hour or so.

PEO. All the damage can be done in less than an hour. You know that. If the fire isn't kept up, with that cold wind outside, before you can know it the silkworms'll——

LA GRISA *appears from the right.*

LA GRISA. Good morning, Nina. Good morning, Peo. Eh, the happy couple! The blessed couple! Oh, what sweet earrings! So that's what they're like! No wonder! No wonder!

PEO. No wonder—what?

LA GRISA. No wonder your brother's wife is telling everybody about them all over the market place.

NINA. Oh, is she? You come from the market, do you?

LA GRISA. Yes—sold my butter—all but one piece. [*She shows it in her basket.*] You don't want any butter?

NINA. We can't afford butter now we're going to get married, can we, Peo?

LA GRISA. We can't afford butter, but we can afford earrings.

NINA. Every bride has her gold earrings. You had yours, too.

LA GRISA. Yes. But they didn't stay with me very long. Tonio gave them and Tonio drank them away. I only hope your husband'll treat you better than Tonio has me.

NINA [*taking Peo's hand, smiling at him*]. I don't think there's much to fear from Peo.

LA GRISA. That's what we all think beforehand. They say shiny words and give us shiny things and — That's a fine kerchief he's given you.

NINA [*quickly, dropping Peo's hand*]. Peo didn't give me this. This was my mother's.

LA GRISA. Your mother's? That was never your mother's. They never made that pattern in her day, I know.

NINA [*definitely*]. I tell you it was.

LA GRISA. Don't try to make me believe that. Just because you want me to think Peo's too poor to buy my butter, I tell you —

NINA [*eagerly*]. Peo, do go and get ready. And

I'll persuade La Grisa to stay and see to the fire.
[She gives him a kiss and urges him to the left.] Do.

[PEO nods and goes off.

Grisa, you will, won't you? Just while we go to the priest?

LA GRISA. I have to get back to the fields to help Tonio.

NINA. Just a tiny half-hour, Grisa?

LA GRISA. A tiny half-hour? And me with my butter unsold and Tonio waiting?

NINA. I tell you. I know they want butter at the inn. Run over and sell it and come back. You know you like sitting before the fire when the wind blows wild like to-day. [Coaxing.] Come, Grisa. You and my mother were like two sisters. You might do this for me.

LA GRISA. Very well. If I can get rid of the butter. [She moves to the right as if to go.] Tell me, Nina. That kerchief. What's the secret about that?

NINA. There's no secret.

LA GRISA. What made you say to Peo you got it from your mother? I priced one exactly like it to-day—at the Masciadro's.

NINA. The Masciadro? What Masciadro?

LA GRISA. The one that drives through the village every Tuesday with his van all bright with laces and ribbons and stuffs. You know: the dark fellow.

NINA. Gioann? But this isn't Tuesday. Today's not his day.

LA GRISA. Go to the market and see for yourself.

NINA [troubled]. Blessed Mary! What is he doing here to-day? [She has gone to the window and draws back from it with a little cry.] Oh!

LA GRISA. What's the matter?

NINA. I—I thought I saw him.

LA GRISA. Who?

NINA. Him. The Masciadro!

LA GRISA. Well, why not? Doesn't he often lock up his van and come and cry his wares down the narrow lanes?

NINA. It is! And he's seen me, too! Saints! What shall I do?

LA GRISA [surprised]. Nina! What is the matter? What is it?

[At the window appears a man of thirty. He is handsome in a common way, with a flashy suit and a soft felt hat. Over his arm he carries

a number of stuffs, kerchiefs, etc. His manner is that of an expert salesman: he looks curiously like JOHN—but his name is GIOANN.]

GIOANN [through the window]. Nina! May I come in, Nina?

NINA [her back to the window, whispering to GRISA]. Let's pretend not to notice him.

LA GRISA. But why? Why?

NINA [nervously]. I don't know!

[GIOANN knocking on the window outside.]

GIOANN. Don't you hear me, Nina?

NINA [desperately, turning with exaggerated manner]. Masciadro! You! What a pleasure! Come in! Come in!

[GIOANN bows suavely and disappears to the right. Oh! [Eagerly to LA GRISA.] Go sell your butter, Grisa. And come back quick.

LA GRISA [inquisitively]. What's all this?

NINA. Nothing! Nothing!

GIOANN enters. Though apparently polite he is extremely sarcastic.

GIOANN. My compliments. Dressed for a festa? How pretty pretty things look on a pretty woman—[turning to LA GRISA]—don't they?

[NINA stands biting her lips.]

GIOANN. The handkerchief and the headdress particularly. Very fine. Almost as fine as the earrings, I should say.

NINA [definitely]. I prefer the earrings.

GIOANN. Evidently.

NINA [to LA GRISA]. Go, Grisa! Go now! But come back presently—won't you?

LA GRISA [looking from one to the other suspiciously]. Yes, I'll come back. I'll only just sell my butter and—— [She takes up her basket and goes off to the right.]

GIOANN [after a pause]. So. Now—what have you got to say for yourself? Eh?

NINA [on the defensive]. What should I have to say for myself?

GIOANN. What should you have——?

NINA [tossing her head]. I've done nothing.

GIOANN. Done nothing? Letting a man come to your door week after week, and making him believe you're free, and taking things from him—that's nothing, is it?

NINA. I'd give 'em back to you here and now—your stupid, ugly, old things!—only Peo thinks they were my mother's.

GIOANN. Oh! So you've lied to him, too?

NINA. I never lied to you, anyhow. You could have asked the whole village about Peo and me.

GIOANN. You made me swear not to speak to a soul about it.

NINA [*pitifully—after a desperate look at GIOANN*]. I wanted the things so much, so much. Not a bride in the village but has her kerchief and silver headdress. And I had none. And no one to give them to me—no father, no mother, or brother. And I couldn't go to Peo without them.

GIOANN. You couldn't buy 'em and pay for 'em honestly like other girls perhaps?

NINA. All the money that I'd earned at the farm I'd spent on our house linen. I hadn't a soldo left. Not a one. And just then—you came to the door and dangled the kerchief before my eyes and I said "No." Remember, I said "No." And then you came again the week after, and again. And then you offered to give it to me for nothing. [*Fiercely.*] You know you did. And the headdress, too.

GIOANN. Yes. Precisely. After you'd kissed me.

[NINA turns away indignantly.]

Oh, yes. You kissed me. And more than once. You're not going to deny that, I suppose? And all the time you were making a fool of me, were you? Nothing but a fool? D'you know why I came to the village to-day instead of Tuesday? To take you to the priest, that's why. And when I heard in the market this morning that you were going to him with another, I—— Ha! A beautiful morning! A wonderful morning for me!

NINA. You're not going to tell Peo? You won't do that, will you? I'll pay for the things. Somehow, I'll do it. It'll take time, but I'll pay.

GIOANN. If you had the money here now, in your hand—do you think I'd take it? Money? Can money make up for what you've done to me?

NINA. You are not going to tell him? He'd kill me if he found out.

GIOANN [*derisively*]. Oh!

NINA. Oh, yes, he would. You don't know Peo. You won't tell him? [*Laying her hand on his arm, coaxingly.*] Will you?

GIOANN [*catching her smile, turning suddenly on her fiercely*]. Oh, you! You! [*He puts his hands round her throat violently.*] It's vain, silly sluts like you that send a man to hell.

NINA [*gives a frightened shriek*]. Oh!

GIOANN [*throwing her off*]. Don't worry. I'm not Peo. I'm not going to risk my skin for a creature like you. Nor my trade neither for that matter. [*He stands panting a moment.*] Is it true what his brother's wife says—that he's giving you this crop of silkworms so you can get married?

NINA. Yes. We couldn't get married except for that.

GIOANN. You have nothing else? Neither Peo nor you?

NINA. Nothing. And we've waited so long. Three years almost. You—you won't tell—will you?

GIOANN. No. I shan't tell him.

NINA [*joyfully*]. Ah!

GIOANN. I've got a much better way than that. I'm going to ruin your crop.

NINA. Ruin the crop?

GIOANN. Yes. While you go to the priest with your Peo, I shall open the windows here.

NINA. You won't.

GIOANN. Half an hour of cold wind and all your nice, fat silkworms will be chilled through and through. And in a day or two, when I'm far away

on the road, they'll be drooping and dying. And your Peo'll wonder what's the reason. But you won't.

NINA. You're joking.

GIOANN. Oh, no, I'm not joking. You've spoilt my life, I spoil yours. That's merely squaring accounts.

NINA [*triumphantly*]. Ah, but you can't, you can't. La Grisa is coming to watch the fire.

GIOANN. I'll soon get rid of La Grisa.

NINA. If you do, it'll be years before we can get married.

GIOANN. Oh, no! Once you've settled with the priest, you'll marry anyway. Only you'll begin in debt, and you'll never get out of it. And you'll have to work, and work, and work. And it won't be long before there'll be children. And still you'll have to work. And in a few years—a very few—my beautiful Nina, you'll be old and worn like La Grisa herself.

NINA. I won't.

GIOANN. Oh, yes! But what do you care? You'll have your bright kerchief and your silver headdress—even if they *have* cost you gray hairs and wrinkles long before your time. And I'll

watch them coming, every week I drive through the village—I'll watch and—

NINA [*tearing off the kerchief*]. Take it! Take it!
It burns me. [*She puts her hand to her headdress.*] They burn me both—

GIOANN [*calmly*]. I wouldn't have them back now, not for the whole world. This is giving me far too much pleasure, far too much. No! Put it on again, my love, or your jealous Peo will wonder what we've been up to—we two.

[NINA stands impotently twisting the kerchief in her hands. PEO is heard singing.]

GIOANN. Quick! Quick! Put it on again, my pretty! That's right! That's right.

[NINA obeys GIOANN against her will. PEO reënters, his hair brushed and his coat and boots on.]

PEO. Ah, the Masciadro! I'm afraid we can buy nothing from you to-day, Masciadro!

GIOANN. I haven't come to sell. I've only come to congratulate you, Peo. You've picked a pearl, as they say. One in a thousand. So beautiful, and young, and simple, and virtuous. I almost envy you—if you'll allow me to say so.

PEO. Thanks, thanks.

[They shake hands. Ten o'clock strikes on the church tower].

Ten o'clock. We must go, Nina.

NINA. Yes, yes. But La Grisa isn't back yet.

PEO. Where is she? Where is she?

GIOANN. I'll stay here and watch the fire if you like. I happen to have a little account to put straight. [He takes out a little notebook, smiling at NINA.]

PEO. That is very good of you. Isn't it, Nina?

NINA. Very.

GIOANN. Oh, it's quite selfish on my part, believe me. Thinking of my future customers, you see. Shall I?

NINA [at the window]. There's La Grisa coming now!

PEO [to GIOANN]. La Grisa promised to. Thank you all the same. And as soon as we can afford it, we'll come to you for all sorts of things, won't we, Nina?

[LA GRISA passes the window quickly.]

GIOANN. Kerchiefs and headdresses and things like that—eh?

PEO. Oh, Nina has no need of kerchiefs and head-

dresses. She had them both from her poor mother. And would you believe it? The kerchief's still as good as new. Look!

GIOANN. I see. Quite as good. [Jokingly.] Better in fact. It costs her nothing.

PEO. Ha! Ha! Exactly! It costs her nothing.

LA GRISA *reënters.*

LA GRISA. They don't want my butter at the inn. So I can't stay here, Nina!

PEO. What shall we do?

GIOANN [to LA GRISA]. Have you tried the rich padrona at the Villa Tasso?

LA GRISA. What? The one right down at the other end of the village?

GIOANN. Yes. Her cook was asking for you all over the market.

NINA [fiercely]. Don't you believe him, Grisa!

GIOANN [with a hard smile at NINA]. And why shouldn't she believe me? It's true—as true as that Peo is going to marry Nina.

PEO [with a grin]. Then it's true indeed! Ha! Ha!

LA GRISA. The Villa Tasso! She pays well. Two soldi a pound more than any one else. Good

morning, Nina—Peo. The Madonna bless you both. Thank you, Gioann! Two soldi more! He! He!

[*She is gone, chuckling.*]

PEO. Horrible old face, isn't it?

GIOANN. Yes, and she's not so very old either. Work and worry I should say. Well, so I'm to watch the fire after all?

PEO. If you will.

GIOANN. Delighted! Delighted to do anything for you and your beautiful young bride.

PEO. And you'll be very careful to keep the room warm?

GIOANN. Don't worry. I know what's wanted.

PEO. Because if anything happened to the silk-worms now, just as they're going to spin——! My brother will never give us another crop. Trust his wife for that. This means everything to us, doesn't it, Nina?

NINA. Yes—everything. [*Desperately.*] Oh, do come, Peo, come! Come!

PEO. Impatient, are you? [To GIOANN with a grin.] Impatient! [He takes her face in his hands and kisses it fondly.] Ha! Ha! Come——!

NINA. Peo! [She pushes him to the door and he goes. She then turns pleading to GIOANN.]

GIOANN [looking her up and down impudently]. God be with you—[with intention, making a face at her]—Grisa!

[PEO's voice outside: "Nina!" NINA goes off desperately. GIOANN stands still until the couple pass at the window. He nods to them pleasantly. After another moment he goes to one window and opens it, then crosses to the other and opens that. As he does so the scene vanishes.]

SCENE III: *The little living-room in a weaver's house at the Croix Rousse, a suburb of Lyons.*

The room is cut off by a thin partition [with a large glass window left and a door centre] from the work-room beyond, in which stand the looms.

The place is very simply, but spotlessly, furnished. To the left stands a table with two chairs [just under the window in the partition], to the right a large upholstered chair with a wheel for winding the silk on bobbins. A little lamp stands on a small table near the wheel. The table left receives its light through the window in the partition.

In the large chair right sits NICOLAS, a man of about twenty-eight, emaciated by illness. He is

working at the wheel, winding bobbins very carefully with threads of gold. Every now and then a fit of coughing stops his work for a moment or two. When he gets back his breath, he goes on with his winding.

Through the window a woman of about twenty-five, ANNETTE [dressed in a plain, neat dress and a long, blue apron dotted with large white spots] may be seen busily weaving at the loom. Her face is hidden by the machinery, but by the color of her hair and figure, she singularly recalls ANNE.

The clacking of the loom and buzzing of the wheel continue for a few moments. Then the noise of the loom ceases. At the same time there is a knock at the door left [which is out of sight].

NICOLAS [calls out in a feeble voice]. Come in!
Come in!

[*The handle of the door is heard to turn and PÈRE SIMON enters. He is a rubicund, white-haired old weaver of seventy, who wears glasses and a funny round smoking cap, such as were worn in the sixties of the last century. His clothes, too, are of an old-fashioned cut. On his feet neat black sabots.*]

P. SIMON. Couldn't hear whether ye said come in or not—but I've come in all the same.

NICOLAS [*half turning in his chair*]. Ah, Père Simon! Good morning! Good mor—— [*He starts coughing.*]

P. SIMON [*shaking his hand*]. Thought I'd just run downstairs for a moment. Well, how goes it this morning?

NICOLAS. Oh, worse, worse—always worse—thanks.

P. SIMON. You seem better though, to-day—somehow. Have a fresher look.

NICOLAS [*grimly*]. As they said about the corpse just before they screwed the coffin up.

P. SIMON. Nonsense! Wait till spring.

NICOLAS [*bitterly*]. I'll never last till spring.

P. SIMON. I'm afraid you've had a bad night.

NICOLAS. Thank you. Hardly slept a wink. What between coughing and the damn loom going all the time.

P. SIMON. You've not been trying to work?

NICOLAS. No. But Annette has. She was at it till all hours. [*He coughs.*] We have to deliver the silk to-day, you see. I took the order on—oh, months ago; before I was taken ill. At least as ill as I'm now. Though I've always had this in me—this—[*tapping his chest*]—this—thing.

P. SIMON [*in the regular tone used to patients*]. We

all have something wrong with us. It's merely a matter of looking after ourselves a little——

NICOLAS [*impatiently*]. Oh, don't try to feed me with the usual invalid's pap! I'm no fool. And I don't care a hang about myself. But it's Annette there! So young and pretty, and—and working her heart out because of me. If I were only safe under the ground, there might be some chance for her then.

P. SIMON [*protesting*]. You mustn't——

NICOLAS. It's bad enough for a strong man—this weaver's life! But when it comes to a woman who has a dead husband hanging round her neck——

P. SIMON. Nicolas! You have no right to let yourself talk like this. It's downright sinful—noting less.

NICOLAS. Sinful! I don't see where the sinful comes in! I'd like to know what earthly sense there is in my living on like this? What good am I, anyhow? Can you tell me that?

P. SIMON. I don't know. But the dear Lord puts us all here for something and keeps us here for something, you may be sure. Even if we never find out just how we help. It doesn't matter. Exactly like each thread on the loom, I always think. We serve somehow—that's certain.

NICOLAS. I'll never believe it. Never. The whole thing's a joke—a huge joke that's being played on us.

[ANNETTE enters carrying a roll of silk. She looks tired and draggled, her fair hair hanging about her face. But when she comes to NICOLAS, she puts on a bright smile and cheerful manner.]

ANNETTE. Nicolas! I've got it done, the piece. It's ready. [She lays the roll on the table left.]

NICOLAS. Have you, my dear! She's a marvel, isn't she, Père Simon?

ANNETTE. Ah, I never saw you. [She comes and shakes hands with PÈRE SIMON.] I can hardly see anything this morning. I've been staring so at the threads all night. Well, what do you say to my man? Don't you think he looks much better? [She gives NICOLAS a gentle kiss.]

P. SIMON. I was just telling him.

ANNETTE. I'll get your milk now. You'd like it warmed a little, wouldn't you?

NICOLAS. Yes. [He smiles at her.]

ANNETTE [patting him, as to a child]. Well, you shall have it warmed. There!

[She goes off to the right.

P. SIMON. Ah, the women! The women! What would we do without 'em? Have you ever seen a weaver make a success of it without a wife? Dusty looms and dirty floors—and before you know it the silk dealers refuse him work, and the place is sold up, and—

[*Outside, to the left, some one is heard whistling loudly a popular French tune.*]

P. SIMON. Now there's a case in point. You know who that is, of course.

NICOLAS. Joanny.

P. SIMON. Of course it's Joanny. Look what's become of him since Thérèse ran away. A drunken, dissolute sot—that's what he's become. And yet there wasn't a better worker in the whole of the Croix Rousse before—

[*A knock is heard on the door left and without waiting for a "Come in" JOANNY (pronounced Jo-ahny) appears. He is a man of about thirty, with a dissolute but witty face, plenty of thick, dark hair, and a little bristling, upturned moustache. His features curiously recall the features of JOHN. He wears the loose velvet trousers of the French workman but not the sash—an ordinary coat and waistcoat.*

In his coat pocket a bottle of red wine. A small cap is stuck on the back of his head. On his shoulder he carries a roll of silk wrapped round a cylindrical piece of wood. The silk is covered with a piece of paper and neatly tied up with tapes. All through the scene JOANNY's manner is just slightly elated by drink, but not exaggeratedly so.]

JOANNY [*depositing his roll of silk near the table*]. Morning, everybody. What! The old philosopher here, too! Talking about heaven and earth, is he? Or running me down? Which is it this time, eh? [*He pats PÈRE SIMON on the back.*]

P. SIMON [*annoyed*]. Get away! You positively reek of drink.

JOANNY [*showing his bottle*]. Oozing out of every pocket, isn't it?

P. SIMON. Joanny! You'll come to a bad end.

JOANNY. Will come, Père Simon? *Have* come and turned round again. I'm on my way back to perfection. When I'm seventy—like you—I dare say I'll be a saint.

P. SIMON. In my day, young men had some sort of reverence for old people.

JOANNY. Who's fault is that nowadays? The young men's or the old people's?

P. SIMON [*snorts violently*]. Oh!

JOANNY. Come, Père Simon. You've been a gay dog in your time. Don't pretend.

P. SIMON. Oh!

JOANNY. There! There, old bird! Don't get ruffled! I didn't come here to insult you. I only came to see the illustrious invalid. How are you, Nicolas?

NICOLAS. I'm feeling no better.

JOANNY. That's right. That's right. What's the use of being an invalid if you can't feel like the devil? Splendid!

P. SIMON [*irritated*]. I'll go, I think.

JOANNY. Do, by all means.

P. SIMON [*to NICOLAS, shaking his hand*]. If there's anything you want—just tell Annette to come upstairs and—

[ANNETTE reënters with a glass of hot milk,
which she gives to NICOLAS.]

Oh, that reminds me—Annette—if you like, I'll carry your piece of silk down to the merchant's as soon as it's ready.

JOANNY. Now that's too bad of you. Precisely what I came to propose to Annette.

P. SIMON [*sarcastically*]. Oh, no doubt!

JOANNY. I did, really. Believe me or not. We had the same order, Nicolas and I. The same pattern and colors, from the same merchant. So naturally, our work being alike——

P. SIMON. Alike! Don't flatter yourself that any work of yours could ever be like any work of Nicolas.

JOANNY. A gentle dig at my habits, I suppose? Have I guessed right?

P. SIMON. Well, I've yet to see the weaver that can do decent work under the continual influence of alcohol. Good morning.

[PÈRE SIMON goes out to left. The door is heard to close. NICOLAS in his chair laughs sarcastically at JOANNY, his laugh ending in a cough. JOANNY stands biting his lip a moment, bitterly.]

JOANNY. Old idiot! He isn't right this time. Bring over that lamp a moment, Annette. I want to show you something. [He undoes the tapes and takes the paper off his piece of silk. ANNETTE meanwhile takes the lamp away from her husband's table.] They all say I can't weave any more. Simply because I—well, a man's got to have some sort of wife, hasn't he? And if mine's run away and I choose to

take up with Mademoiselle Piquette—[he taps his bottle]—what business is it of his—or theirs—or anybody's?

ANNETTE. Yes, Joanny, yes. Only it does seem a pity, such a good workman like you—

JOANNY. Oh, d'you think my rosy little bride—[he shows his bottle]—is going to prevent my working well if I've a mind to? Look at this. You know what this pattern means. You've woven it yourself there. [He points to the other piece.] Does this smell of alcohol, this?

ANNETTE [looking at it]. It's beautiful work.

JOANNY. Of course it is! I thought I'd just show them I can weave if I choose to—bottle or no bottle.

ANNETTE. Of course you can.

JOANNY. The fools! D'you know they've talked it all over the quarter. I'm the disgrace, the thing to point at and spit at. It's even got down to Lyons, to the silk merchants. And when I go for orders to the different houses, they hum and haw before they'll give me anything to do. Would you believe it, the agent here for this piece, he's come up a dozen times at least in the last month to see whether I was really at the loom or not. I gave him a bit of my

tongue the last time he popped his sleek, shiny face in at the door.

ANNETTE. Monsieur Rondier?

JOANNY. Yes, Rondier. The baby! To talk to me like that!

ANNETTE. He came in here, too, once or twice. And I've had to be so careful about Nicolas. He mustn't know he's ill, or we won't get any more orders. They don't believe in women doing the big weaving. [Dropping her voice.] And they're right, too. They can't. It's too hard for them. They haven't the strength. [With a glance at NICOLAS's chair.] Look at that! [She points to her piece of silk.] It's— [She shakes her head, making a wry face.]

JOANNY. It won't be so bad when you've picked up the loose threads.

ANNETTE [putting her fingers to her lips, indicating that NICOLAS is not to hear; in a casual voice]. Nicolas! Have some more milk?

[NICOLAS doesn't answer.]

ANNETTE [after a pause, in a whisper to JOANNY]. He's asleep. The warm milk. It always sends him off for a bit. [Pointing to her work.] No. It's bad work. Bad. I only pray to God when the agent comes to-day that he'll pass it. You see I've stayed

up these last five nights to get it done. We want the money—every sou of it. He drinks a lot of milk now, you see. And he can't do much, only wind the bobbins. And then there's the rent, of course. And the doctor! Oh! It's terrible—I can tell you. And it's going to be terrible, till—— [She stares before her. JOANNY looks at the silk rather desperately; then breaks into a low laugh.]

ANNETTE. What is it?

JOANNY. I don't know. I was only thinking; funny life, isn't it? Here we are both of us: you with your useless husband, and me with my worse than useless wife!

ANNETTE. She was so pretty!

JOANNY. Too pretty.

ANNETTE. Do you ever hear from her nowadays?

JOANNY [bitterly]. Oh, yes. Not from her direct, but about her—more than enough. She has her own motor now in Paris. And a footman, too, I'm told. Very grand.

ANNETTE. Why don't you divorce her?

JOANNY. What for? Marry again when I've got—[tapping his bottle]—this faithful friend? No, thank you.

[There is a knock on the door left. ANNETTE goes to open it. JOANNY stands fingering ANNETTE's piece of stuff.]

ANNETTE'S VOICE. Oh, good morning, Monsieur Rondier. Do come in!

RONDIER'S VOICE. I only came to see if the order's ready. We must have the silk to-day.

[RONDIER appears, a young man of twenty-two or three, well dressed, very polite, but distinctly superior and self-important. When he examines the silk, he does so through a little square pocket magnifying glass, such as is used for linen. He carries a soft felt hat in his hand.]

ANNETTE. Yes. It's ready. Won't you sit down? I'll just wake my husband. He's been working all night to get it done.

RONDIER. No! Don't! Don't! [Seeing JOANNY.] Oh, you're here, are you?

JOANNY. Now, there's a pretty surprise for you, eh?

ANNETTE [by NICOLAS's chair, gently]. Nicolas!

RONDIER. No! Let him sleep. He deserves it. [Looking at the silk.] Splendid! Splendid! Ha! One can always tell Nicolas's work at a glance.

JOANNY. Can one?

RONDIER. I can, at any rate. I suppose—[drawing over the other silk disdainfully]—this—is yours?

JOANNY. How could you guess?

ANNETTE [coming back from NICOLAS's chair, seeing RONDIER's mistake]. But that—

JOANNY [lays his hand on ANNETTE's arm, arresting her, and winking at her. Then turns to RONDIER]. Well? And what do you say to my work, Monsieur le Prince?

RONDIER [sententiously]. Precisely what I expected it would be. Look at that thread. And that! And there again. Never saw such workmanship in my life. If you think the house is going to accept rubbish like this—

ANNETTE [with a start]. Oh!

RONDIER [to her]. No, no. Don't pity him. It's a disgrace! That's what it is. Half pay's all you get on this. And if I had my way no pay at all. You can take it from me; this is the last time you've had an order from us, and no mistake.

ANNETTE [though held back by JOANNY]. But—

RONDIER. No, no. Don't plead for him. You women are far too soft hearted. This is business. [With a smile.] And tell your husband to get his

silk down by noon—not later. Good morning, Madame.

[*He bows and goes off to the left. The door is heard to close.*]

ANNETTE. What do you mean by stopping me? He's got to know sooner or later. You've only made it worse by this.

JOANNY. He doesn't need to know. In fact—
[*after a pause*]—he mustn't know.

ANNETTE. But he must.

JOANNY. Not if you don't tell him.

ANNETTE. But I've got to.

JOANNY. Not at all. It's very simple. Just as he said—[*pointing to the silks*]-this is *your work* now—[*pointing to his own*]-and this—[*pointing to ANNETTE's*]-this is mine.

ANNETTE. But it isn't.

JOANNY. It is—if we say so. And we *will* say so. That's all.

ANNETTE. You mean I'm to take your work and pass it off as mine?

JOANNY. That's about it.

ANNETTE. Oh, but I can't do that. It wouldn't be fair.

JOANNY. Oh, it's perfectly fair as long as I'm

willing. Whose business is it but ours—if we choose to have a little secret between us?

ANNETTE. Oh, but I couldn't—couldn't accept such a sacrifice.

JOANNY. Sacrifice—pooh! Why use such a big word?

ANNETTE. Oh, but it *is* a sacrifice. It would be—that is.

JOANNY. It isn't—it isn't at all. What does it matter to me?

ANNETTE. To begin with, you'd only get half pay.

JOANNY. Well, why not? I don't need the money. After all, I'm quite alone in the world. My rosy bride don't cost me the tenth of what your poor Niclas does you.

ANNETTE. Yes, but even so. Your future work—your reputation.

JOANNY. My reputation! Aha! That's just it! My reputation's as rotten as can be. I've been doing vile work for months and months. They expect it of me. In fact, they'd be furious with me if they didn't get it. So you see——

[ANNETTE makes a protesting gesture.]
No, seriously, I mean it. It's different with Nicclas.

He can't afford to get a bad name. The money means too much to him just now—you said so yourself. He has to have a lot of milk. And after all, Annette—[*very gently*]—it may not be for very long. You know that as well as I.

ANNETTE. Yes, I know that.

JOANNY. Well, then? Why not? [*With an effort at chaffing.*] Or perhaps my work isn't good enough for you? Is that it? Eh?

ANNETTE [*smiling, her eyes filling with tears.*]. Oh, Joanny! Joanny! [*She sits down, bursting into tears.*]

JOANNY. Good God! What's the matter now?

ANNETTE. I can't help it. It's not the dreadful things in life that make us cry; it's the good things. This is too wonderful—too wonderful of you.

JOANNY [*deprecatingly*]. Oh, yes. Wonderful! Of course.

ANNETTE. It is! It is! Here I've been working day and night this week to keep the house together, and then with one word, that boy was going to wipe it all out, and then you—you— [*She sobs again.*]

JOANNY. Now—now—now. Pull yourself together. This won't do—or I shall have to burst into

tears myself. And you wouldn't like that now, would you? Tears of alcohol?

NICOLAS [*suddenly starts a fit of coughing, wakes up, and calls out querulously*]. Annette! Annette! Where's my lamp? I'm all in the dark here.

ANNETTE. I'm bringing it, Nicolas. [*She takes the lamp from the table left and brings it over to NICOLAS. JOANNY meanwhile rolls up ANNETTE's piece of silk and puts it under his arm.*]

NICOLAS. Has Monsieur Rondier been? It seemed to me I heard his voice. Or was I dreaming?

ANNETTE. No, he's been.

NICOLAS. And he's satisfied with the work?

JOANNY. More than satisfied. You should have heard him.

NICOLAS. Oh, you're there still, are you?

JOANNY. Yes, but I'm going. Don't worry.

NICOLAS. Yes. You better. We've got to work, we have to. We can't afford to loaf. [*He begins to busy himself sorting out bobbins. ANNETTE has crossed back to JOANNY, who points to the bale of silk under his arm, then to NICOLAS, and then puts his finger to his lips, indicating that she is to say nothing of the matter to her husband. ANNETTE, after hesitating, consents with a reluctant smile and a nod of the head.*]

JOANNY. Good morning—both of you.

NICOLAS [carelessly]. Morning! [He starts the wheel going to wind his bobbins.]

ANNETTE [gently, her eyes on JOANNY]. Joanny! [She holds out her hand and shakes JOANNY's hand warmly.] Good morning, Joanny. [She goes off quickly through the door and can be seen returning to her loom. JOANNY hitches up his trousers, takes a swig from his bottle, then shoulders the other bale of silk and goes off to the left, whistling loudly.

Curtain

ACT II



ACT II

SCENE I: *The garden of a small Dutch house of about 1660. The house, with a door leading into it, and a double window with red shutters, occupies two thirds of the background, extending off to the right—where there is evidently a garden. This garden, on the right side, is railed in by a low wooden fence, over which hang lilac bushes. The other third of the background (to the left) is occupied by a stone wall about seven feet high, with a door in it that leads into a street. When the door is open, a canal way is seen through it with houses on the side opposite. A bench stands under the window by the house, and just under the lilac bush to the right, a square rustic table with a chair above it, and a stool in front of it. Close by the table there is also the traditional lacemaker's pillow on its little wooden stand. The pillow is covered with many bobbins. A blue satin box containing various pieces of lace stands on the table.*

MOEDER KAATJE is sitting in the garden, the pillow before her, busily making lace. She is a

woman of about sixty, plainly dressed in the costume of the period, with a large white apron; a snowy cap frames in her honest, round, red face. She works away in silence for a few minutes.

There is a sudden knock—in fact a quick succession of knocks on the street door.

MOEDER K. [rising]. Yes, yes, yes! I come! I come! What's all this to do?

[She goes to the door, opening it. A girl of seventeen, ANTJE, whose features recall ANNE, enters the garden quickly, closing the door behind her. She is a charming young person—dressed in the delightful “undress” costume of the period: a rich skirt trimmed with a silk border, and a loose satin jacket edged with fur. Over her head she has thrown a veil. When she takes it off she reveals the daintiest of little caps, her ringlets falling over her ears on either side. She is evidently in great distress.]

MOEDER K. [surprised]. Mejuffer Antje!

ANTJE [flinging herself on MOEDER KAATJE's ample bosom]. Oh, nurse! Nurse! [She bursts into tears.]

MOEDER K. Antje! My little Antje! What's

this? In heaven's name—tell me—my little child, my poppet!

ANTJE. Oh, nurse! My father—my honored father—he desires to marry me to a loathsome man, a terrible man, a man I cannot suffer, and will never suffer as long as there's breath in my body.

MOEDER K. Come! Come! Why's he so loathsome? So terrible? What's wrong with him?

ANTJE. The whole man's wrong, nurse. He is indeed! Quite wrong! Quite wrong from top to toe.

MOEDER K. There! There! Calm yourself, my pretty! Sit down. Here, so. Now explain, Antje.

ANTJE. Yes, but—

MOEDER K. Yes, but—quietly! Quietly! Now. Dry your tears. Quietly! Quietly! Now tell me. Who is he? Where does he come from?

ANTJE. He comes from Amsterdam. And his name's Jonkheer Ian van der Bom. His father's an old friend of my father's. And they've written and arranged it all between them, with never so much as a word to me [MOEDER KAATJE: Dear! dear!]. And Jonkheer Ian arrived in town last night, and paid his respects at once to my father. And he supped at the house. And he's coming again to-day. And I—

how can I escape him, the hateful creature, with his foolish face and foolish voice?

MOEDER K. And prithee what said he to you that was so foolish?

ANTJE. Not a word, thank Heaven! Not a word. I never gave him the opportunity. The moment I caught a glimpse of him from the top of the stairs and heard his empty laugh—that was enough for me. I turned forthwith and ran back to my room and undressed and jumped into bed. And when my honored father sent for me, I pleaded a headache and a fainting fit.

MOEDER K. Oh, did you, miss! Did you!

ANTJE. Yes, and later on, when the maid brought me some supper, I questioned her. He's a fool! A popinjay. Jonkheer Ian! Nothing else. A fop, who's been to Paris and has his mouth full of French words and windy sentiments! And his locks are curled and his hands sweet with musk. I should kill him—kill him in a week—if my father married me to him. I know I should, nurse!

MOEDER K. [patting her hands]. Hush! Hush! Does Mynheer, your father, know you've come here to me?

ANTJE. No! Heaven forbid. I dressed as quietly

as a mouse; and waited and waited till I saw my chance. And then out I ran, all the length of the bay and over the bridge, through the little back streets—to you.

MOEDER K. My little Antje!

ANTJE. You'll help me, nurse, will you not? I've no one to go to but you. No mother but you, nurse. And my father listens to you. He knows what you say is wise and right. You will, nurse, you—

[*There is a knock on the street door.*]

ANTJE. Oh! Who is that?

MOEDER K. [*rising and going to the door*]. Who should it be? Probably the milk. [*She opens the door. MYNHEER CORNELIS appears. He is an elderly, sturdy, Dutch gentleman, dressed in dark brown with a plain linen collar, black hat, and long black stick. His costume is very restrained and simple.*]

ANTJE [*at the sight of him*]. Father! Not the milk, nurse.

MYNHEER [*equally surprised*]. Antje! What are you doing here?

ANTJE. I—I came to see nurse, father.

MYNHEER. You sent me down word that your headache was no better.

ANTJE. I know, sir. I—Oh, nurse—speak for me.

MOEDER K. She's very unhappy, Mynheer. She does not wish to marry the Jonkheer van der Bom.

MYNHEER. Not wish to marry the Jonkheer? How's this? How's this? So that's what your headache's been? You've had no headache at all?

ANTJE. Indeed, honored father, I've had a headache besides. Truly, I have.

MYNHEER. Don't lie to me, Mejuffer. You've had no headache at all. And if you have, you're not to have one after this, d'you hear? I'll have no nonsense in my house. I know what's best for you. There's not a grander name in the whole of Holland than van der Bom. Not a one. And when he comes here presently—

ANTJE [*terrified*]. He's coming here? *Here?*

MYNHEER. He's to meet me here at nine. He intends buying you a gift, a bridal gift. I told him you were fond of lace—and that Moeder Kaatje was the finest lacemaker of our town. But had I known she was harboring a rebellious child—

ANTJE. No, my father! No! 'Tis no fault of hers. I came here not a moment since. Fled here in my despair!

MYNHEER [*flaring up*]. Fled here? Fled here? What sort of language is this? Have you ever been ill-treated by me in all your life? Or talked to roughly—eh? Or crossed in any way? Fled here indeed! I'll have you pick your words, Mejuffer, or—[*waving his stick*]—by God, I'll not be answerable for what I do.

MOEDER K. [coming between them]. Mynheer! Mynheer! Remember! She's your daughter! Your dear wife's only child. Mynheer!

MYNHEER. Only child, or no child at all, I tell you she shall marry the man I choose.

MOEDER K. Mynheer! Mynheer! Forgive my boldness. One word only, I beg of you.

MYNHEER. Well? What is it?

MOEDER K. Pray consider! After all 'tis Mejuffer who has to wed the Jonkheer—not you! How know you, sir, that he's the right man?

ANTJE. Yes, father. How know you he's the right man?

MOEDER K. How know you he is not merely after her money?

ANTJE. Yes, father! How know you that?

MYNHEER. Listen to them! The right man in-

deed! After her money? Is not his father one of my oldest, most honored friends?

ANTJE. The father perhaps. But what of the son?

MYNHEER. The son's his father's son. That's quite enough for me.

ANTJE. Enough for you, sir, perhaps. But not for me.

MYNHEER. And what more would you know of him, Mejuffer Impudence?

ANTJE. Everything, father. Everything.

MYNHEER. Everything indeed! And how mean you to find out everything, pray?

ANTJE. How? [After a pause.] Father! Promise to let me do what I shall ask of you—and I'll promise to marry your man—if you still wish.

MYNHEER. I buy no cat in a bag. Speak your meaning.

ANTJE. I mean let me try this Jonkheer. Put him to the test.

MYNHEER. Put him to the test? How?

ANTJE. He's coming here you say? He intends to buy lace?

MYNHEER. Yes. Well?

ANTJE. Let *me* sell him the lace. Let *me* play

Moeder Kaatje, or better—Kaatje's daughter. He's never set eyes on me. He knows me not. I can stand here and sell and bargain like the best of 'em. [MYNHEER: No! No!] Oh, you shall listen to every word, if you desire. [Pointing to the house.] In there! There shall be no cheating. You shall judge for yourself. And so shall I. What say you—my honored, my best of fathers?

MYNHEER. No! No! A most unmaidenly proceeding. I'll not hear of it.

ANTJE [*pleading*]. Father!

[*A knock on the street door.*]

There he is now! Father!

MOEDER K. [*pleading*]. Mynheer! You'll never have such a chance again! 'Twill prove him for all time to come.

ANTJE. Father! It means my happiness for life.

MOEDER K. And yours, too, Mynheer. You know you love your child.

ANTJE [*stroking his chin*]. Father! Dearest father!

MOEDER K. Mynheer! [Another knock.]

MYNHEER. Well! Have it your own way!
Only—

ANTJE. Yes, yes. I'll marry him if he proves

true. You have my word! Yes! Yes! [Pushing her father toward the house.] Quick! Kaatje! Now. Take my kerchief and my jacket. [She takes off her kerchief from her head and her satin jacket, revealing a simple dress below.] Your apron, good Kaatje—your apron—

[KAATJE takes off her apron.]

So! So now I am your daughter, Kaatje, so! Your box of laces. Where are they?

MOEDER K. [pointing to the blue satin box on the table]. There! The prices are all marked.

ANTJE. I'll sell them for you! And well! Guelders' and guelders' worth. You'll see! [Another impatient knock. Tying on the apron, calling out.] Yes! I come! I come! So—am I right—so?

MOEDER K. Yes. Yes.

ANTJE. Into the house! [To her father by the door.] Father! Kaatje! [Calling out.] I come!

[MYNHEER and KAATJE go off into the house. I come! [ANTJE opens the door to the street.]

[JONKHEER IAN is standing on the sill. His features resemble JOHN'S. He is a tall thin young man of about twenty-two, dressed completely in black silk with a pointed hat. His clothes are much beribboned, he wears a

broad collar and full, frilled cuffs, edged with narrow lace. The “canons” [frills] round his knees are huge, and his “petticoat breeches” very full. In face his appearance exactly corresponds to the portrait of a gentleman by Terborch in the National Gallery. His manner is extremely foppish and artificial.]

JONKHEER [in a superior tone, scarcely noticing ANTJE]. Ma foi! Is there no one to wait upon the door? My arm is weary with knocking.

ANTJE. I'm sorry, Mynheer. I did not hear.

JONKHEER. Is this the house of Moeder Kaatje, the lacemaker?

ANTJE. Yes, Mynheer.

JONKHEER. I am Jonkheer Ian van der Bom of Amsterdam. I have an appointment here with Mynheer Cornelis. Evidently he has not yet put in an appearance.

ANTJE. As Mynheer Jonkheer says.

JONKHEER [annoyed]. Late! And I'm the one to have to wait. I—a van der Bom to dance attendance on a country merchant! The situation is droll to say the least! Most droll! [Laughs wearily.] Ha! Ha!

ANTJE. Would the Jonkheer like to look at some of the laces meanwhile?

JONKHEER. Where is the good woman?

ANTJE. Moeder Kaatje's not here to-day. She was called away. But I can show them to the Jonkheer quite as well.

JONKHEER. I presume you're the daughter, are you?

ANTJE. As the Jonkheer says. I am the daughter.

JONKHEER. Très bien! [Yawning.] I may as well kill time somehow till the mighty Mynheer decides to keep his appointment—— [He goes toward the house.]

ANTJE [interrupting him]. Not in there, I pray you, but here, so it please the Jonkheer. 'Tis—'tis somewhat warm in the house to-day. Permit me to offer you a chair.

JONKHEER [wearily]. Merci! Merci! I am “mort de fatigue” after a horrible night at that wretched town inn of yours! Absolument mort de fatigue! [He sinks wearily into the chair.]

[ANTJE, behind the chair, pulls a face at him, then goes over to the table.]

ANTJE. What kind of lace is it that the Jonkheer

desires? For his wrist frills? Or his collar—or perchance a handkerchief to complete his beautiful toilet?

JONKHEER [*flattered, foolishly*]. Oh, these clothes are nothing! Only a little early morning fancy of my own! I had it made in Paris.

ANTJE. Oh, the Jonkheer has been in Paris?

JONKHEER [*with a superior tone*]. I'm only just returned. Every man of quality goes to Paris these days. What would one do for the fashions were it not for Paris? Smell that—— [*He holds out his hand to ANTJE.*] Could one procure such heavenly odors anywhere but in Paris?

ANTJE. Wonderful!

JONKHEER. Amber! Amber with a soupçon of civet!

ANTJE. A soupçon.

JONKHEER. And these taffeta ribbons? A hundred and twenty ells in the petticoat alone. [*He rises.*] You observe? There and there and here. And the cut of the cape. Mark it close. [*He turns round.*] Where else could one find such a cut! Is it not an inspiration? A poet's vision? Ah! Paris! Paris! [*He sinks back into his chair.*] Bon Dieu, that I were back in Paris!

ANTJE. 'Tis too marvellous.

JONKHEER. Of course there's one sad defect about the costume—one very sad defect indeed. You've noted it, sans doute.

ANTJE. It all seems perfection to me!

JONKHEER [*wearily*]. You would not observe it—naturally. You lack the French eye. The nose. The flaire! Shall I tell you? Shall I whisper it? The collar! Look at the collar!

ANTJE. The collar?

JONKHEER. The lace! Painfully, absurdly narrow. Say at least—at least—[*holding out his fingers*]—this much. Quite—quite an inch and a quarter.

ANTJE. How dreadful! Yes, now I do observe it! It ruins everything.

JONKHEER. Everything!

ANTJE. But we might remedy that, I think, Mynheer. [*She opens the box of laces.*]

JONKHEER. Fi donc! Dutch lace—I? Jamais! Jamais! My dear mademoiselle—there is no lace in Holland. There never was! There never will be. All this on my ruffles is Alençon. Point d'Alençon.

ANTJE. And yet the Jonkheer comes to us for lace.

JONKHEER. Oh, but not for myself. No. Merely for a lady.

ANTJE. Oh, merely for a lady.

JONKHEER. Yes. You may as well know. I've just done Mynheer Cornelis the honor to accept the hand of his daughter.

ANTJE. Have you?

JONKHEER. Yes. You know her—no doubt?

ANTJE. Yes. I know her.

JONKHEER. Then you might possibly advise me. Which one of these—shall we say—these efforts—would take her taste? [*Looking at a piece of lace as an idea strikes him.*] Here's not a bad piece—for Dutch work. What might be the price of this?

ANTJE. This? [*Looking at the mark.*] This you could have for sixty guelders.

JONKHEER. Sixty? Is that all? I paid two hundred louis for these ruffles! Sixty! Ridiculous! Have you nothing better?

ANTJE. Here's a better piece! Longer and wider. I'm sure Mejuffer would fancy this piece immensely.

JONKHEER. How much?

ANTJE. One hundred and eighty this.

[*MOEDER KAATJE's head appears at the window, and a moment later MYNHEER's. They listen intently.*]

JONKHEER [*showing her the mark*]. But 'tis marked ninety.

ANTJE. A mistake! A slip! Will you have it? 'Tis our very finest work. Nothing would please her better than if you took this—for a hundred and eighty. I'm confident.

JONKHEER. A large amount to give.

ANTJE. You paid two hundred for those ruffles of yours.

JONKHEER. Aye. But they were for *me*—for my own person.

ANTJE. I see. That makes a difference.

JONKHEER. A great difference.

ANTJE. Well, shall we say a hundred and seventy—to conclude the bargain?

JONKHEER. One hundred and fifty.

ANTJE. One hundred and seventy—and not a guelder less.

JONKHEER. Very well. I'll not bargain. I never do. But on one condition—that you'll answer me one little question.

ANTJE. Which is?

JONKHEER. What is she like—in truth, this Mejuffer Antje?

ANTJE. Oh, that's it?

JONKHEER. Yes. [He takes the lace and pockets it.]

ANTJE [*calmly*]. A hundred and seventy we said.

JONKHEER [*as if recollecting*]. To be sure! I'm so distract. The van der Boms are all distract! [He takes the money out of a silk purse.] There. There's one hundred! Now, twenty—forty—sixty!

[*As he counts ANTJE catches sight of MOEDER KAATJE at the window and makes signs to her.*] We said sixty, did we not?

ANTJE. Seventy.

JONKHEER. Seventy? Did we? [*With a sigh.*] Well! I never bargain. There's your money. Now tell me. Will she prove obedient? Pliable? Ready to learn?

ANTJE. To learn what?

JONKHEER. Everything. For 'tis clear I shall have to take her to Paris. To have her taught—from the beginning. How to talk and how to walk. What kind of clothes to wear. What perfumes. How to dress her hair. Pauvre petite! There'll be a great deal to correct. A great deal, I fear me.

ANTJE. Oh, you fear so, do you?

JONKHEER. Oh, I know it. They say she's pretty, of course. But we all know what that means.

Country taste and city taste! Ha! Ha! And yet I ask not for a miracle of beauty. Even were she merely as pretty as you, ma petite——

ANTJE. Mynheer thinks me pretty?

JONKHEER. Gentille! Très gentille for your station.

ANTJE. Oh, thank you, Mynheer.

JONKHEER. Something could be made of you, I'm confident. Something most—most passable. [*He leans across the table trying to stroke ANTJE's cheek.*]

ANTJE [avoiding his hand]. Oh, Mynheer! What would Mejuffer Antje say!

JONKHEER. Mejuffer Antje! Think you I'll trouble my head as to what Mejuffer Antje may say? 'Tis bad enough to have to marry her—Mejuffer Antje!

ANTJE. Bad enough? Then pray why do you marry her?

JONKHEER. Oh, thou blessed simplicity! Have you never heard of the little word—debts?

ANTJE. Debts?

JONKHEER. Do you suppose that any other reason would make a gentleman of my position take up with a country merchant's daughter? And come down to a miserable town like this, and bow and bob to an old self-important fool of a father?

ANTJE [*glancing over at the window*]. Oh, her father, an old self-important fool is he?

JONKHEER. An ass. A very ass! Strutting about and braying and laying down the law to everybody! And that merely because he's succeeded in making his fortune! Which heaven alone knows how and by what means he's done it!

[MYNHEER disappears from the window, shaking with rage, and appears in the house door; slowly, step by step, he comes into the courtyard.]

ANTJE. Sure he's come by his money honestly.

JONKHEER. Honestly? Have you ever noted his little pig eyes? And his snout of a mouth? Faces like that never make their money honestly—take my word for it!

MYNHEER [*suddenly confronting the JONKHEER*]. Oh, do they not? Do they not? Well, if they don't, at least they can give a beating honestly—you take my stick for that.

JONKHEER [*who has sprung up*]. What's this? A trap?

MYNHEER. Yes, and thank God my daughter set it. [*He points to ANTJE*.]

JONKHEER. Your daughter?

MYNHEER. Out with you! Out with you, you dog—or, as I live, I'll break this over your back—infamous puppy!

JONKHEER. Country boors! What a fortunate escape! Here, Mejuffer! Take your lace—give me back my money.

ANTJE. Oh, no! You bought it. 'Tis yours. The money goes to my nurse. [She turns to MOEDER KAATJE who stands in the doorway of the house.] Keep the lace. Trim your collar with it. Remedy the defect of your costume. [Imitating him.] "The sad defect. The lace, painfully, absurdly narrow. By quite—quite an inch and a quarter." Ha! Ha! Ha!

JONKHEER [furious, breathless]. Oh, I—— [Assuming his affected manner again.] Barbarians! I shall go back to Paris!

[He turns and goes off solemnly into the street.

The other three burst out laughing heartily; then turn and bow solemnly to the audience.]

Curtain

SCENE II: A dingy dark room in the East End. At the back a wall, covered with a muddy brown paper; a few ugly colored pictures on it. The door is to

the right. Along the wall a row of hooks with some clothes and a washstand with tin basin, etc. Along the wall, to the left, a kitchen dresser with china. To the right (not seen) the hearth. A couple of plain deal chairs right and left. In the centre a large table with an oil lamp shaded with a green shade. On the table countless pieces of colored cloth, bits of wire, etc., for making artificial flowers. The lamp is lighted. In fact it is the only light which lights the whole scene.

Behind the table, busily at work on her artificial flowers, sits ANNIE. She is a pale, frail girl of eighteen with an eager face crowned by an immense amount of beautiful red-gold hair. This hangs down behind so as to hide her deformity, for she is a hunchback. She wears a white rather soiled apron over a very plain dark bodice. Nothing else can be seen of her, as all through the scene she never moves from her chair behind the table. By the hearth, MRS. MOSS, a stout, elderly Jewish woman, of a motherly type, with a brisk, shrewd manner. She is on her knees poking the fire—which cannot be seen. But the clatter of the poker on the iron and then the glow show her operation to be effective. Everybody in the scene talks cockney, of course.

MRS. MOSS. There, dearie! There! The fire's all right again! Shall I put the kettle on?

ANNIE [*who never stops working all through the scene except when she takes her tea*]. Yas! There's a dear!

MRS. MOSS. Per'aps you'll 'ave yer tea before Liza comes 'ome?

ANNIE. What d'you take me for? Not wait for Liza?

MRS. MOSS [*taking the kettle and putting it on the hearth*]. But it's so cold in 'ere to-day, dearie. You must be froze.

ANNIE. No more'n usual.

MRS. MOSS. Will you get them flowers done in time?

ANNIE. Well, what time is it now?

MRS. MOSS [*looking at the clock on the dresser*]. Close on six.

ANNIE. They take a deal of doin', these 'ere fancy velvet roses.

MRS. MOSS. But they're wonderful when they do get done. Got a rare knack with them fingers o' yours.

ANNIE. It's a 'abit—that's what it is. Just 'abit! 'Aven't I been at it more years'n I like to think of?

MRS. MOSS. 'Ow old are you exactly, Annie?

ANNIE. What makes you ask?

MRS. MOSS. I was only just wonderin'.

ANNIE [defiantly]. I'm eighteen come Christmas, if you must know. And I'm not ashamed of it, neither.

MRS. MOSS. Eighteen! As much as that?

ANNIE. Oh, you think 'cause my 'air's down, don't you? Well, I can't abear to put it up—that's why.

MRS. MOSS [conciliatory]. 'Course not. You'd be 'avin' 'eadaches all day long, wouldn't you? You've got such loads and loads of it! And such a color, too! My 'usband always says, says Sam: "There's a fortune in that girl's 'air." And 'e ought ter know—bein' as he is in 'air 'imself and a first-class barber.

ANNIE. A fortune? Two or three quids per'aps?

MRS. MOSS. More like ten, I should say.

ANNIE. Ten quid? Garn!

MRS. MOSS. 'Struth. We could all make a bit out of this 'air o' yours if you'd only sell it. I've never seen the likes of it and on such a little body, too. Strikes me all your strength's gone into your 'air. [She fingers it.]

ANNIE. The nurses in the 'Ome, they used to say the same sort o' thing. And me only a bit of kid then. It's when they tried to straighten me out and get me legs to work. You know, six years ago. D'you know what they called me? "Goldilocks."

MRS. MOSS. Goldilocks. Oh, did they?

ANNIE. Yas. And there was one of 'em—Nurse Porter she was—she used to read me sometimes when I couldn't sleep: a book about fairy tales—one in particular about a queen or a princess it was—I forget. And they locked 'er up in a tower, like the wicked witch did. She 'ad 'air just like mine—only longer; 'cause it was in a tale this, you see. And she used to sit by the window and let it down. And the prince 'e come a-ridin' along one fine day. And 'e couldn't get up to 'er. So 'e just climb up 'er 'air.

MRS. MOSS. Such rubbish I never did 'ear! Climb up 'er 'air indeed. I'd like to see anybody a-climbin' up my 'air. I'd soon give 'em the chuck.

ANNIE. Ain't I tellin' yer it was only a tale?

MRS. MOSS. Yes, and nice goings-on, too. You don't catch any of our royal ladies a-'angin' their 'eads out of Buckingham Palace with their 'air all in a mess. People in tales never 'ave no self-respec'. I don't 'old with no tales.

ANNIE. I dunno. I think it sounds kind o' pretty some'ow. Any'ow it done so in the 'Ome, the way Nurse Porter used to read it.

MRS. MOSS [*doubtfully*]. Per'aps.

ANNIE. It did reely. [*After a pause, with a sigh.*] Well, any'ow—one thing I do know, fairy tales or no fairy tales—there'll never be no prince for me. No, nor any other bloke for that matter. [*Tentatively, with a quick glance.*] What do you think, Mrs. Moss?

MRS. MOSS. You never know, Annie. There might.

ANNIE [*eagerly*]. D'youthink so, Mrs. Moss? Honest? With this—[*pointing to her back*]-this back o' mine?

MRS. MOSS [*in a kindly manner*]. Oh, it don't show. It don't indeed, dearie.

ANNIE. O' course it don't show much, now I 'ave my 'air down. But I can't go on a-keepin' it down forever.

MRS. MOSS. Why not?

ANNIE. No. Not when once Liza gets married. I'll 'ave to put it up after next week. Everybody in the street knows she's younger'n me. I can't go on like this after she's married. They'd laugh at me.

MRS. MOSS. Let 'em laugh. What d'youthink?

ANNIE. I can't 'elp it. I do care. You see they come round 'ere most of 'em, once in a while. They want to touch me back. It brings 'em luck they say.

[*To the right the door is heard to open and slam.*

LIZA enters, a typical cockney factory girl of sixteen, healthy, raw-boned, with a dirty face, towslid hair, and a soiled factory apron and old hat.]

LIZA. 'Ello, Annie! 'Ow's life been treatin' you since this mornin'. Awright?

ANNIE [brightening]. Oh, I'm awright, Liza.

LIZA [*waving her hat at Mrs. Moss*]. 'Ello, Mrs. Moss! [Doing a step.] "You made me love you."

MRS. MOSS. You seem in pretty grand spirits, me lady, don't you?

LIZA. Never say die, Mrs. Moss. Jack and me's off to the Brit first 'ouse to-night. Got a couple o' passes from a pal what's got a sister as does a turn with performin' guinea pigs.

ANNIE. Oh, Liza—you can't go to-night!

LIZA. What's wrong?

ANNIE. These 'ere roses o' mine. We promised to deliver 'em by eight to-night.

LIZA. Lor' lumme! If I ain't gone and clean

forgot these 'ere blasted roses of yours. And Jack a-comin' 'ere for 'is tea any minute now.

ANNIE. You've ast 'im to tea?

LIZA. Yus. Before we goes to the show. Met 'im at the corner. He's just gone 'ome to tidy up like.

ANNIE. But they've got to 'ave them roses, Liza. They're workin' overtime to get the dresses out for to-morrow's show. You remember what they told you. There'll be no pay if—

LIZA [*annoyed—taking off her apron savagely*]. Yus! Yus! Yus! I remember! The blighters! Why cawn't they come and fetch 'em theirselves, eh? 'Tain't enough for me to 'ave to stand all day over a stinkin' stew in a pickle factory! 'Ave to go and trapse all night to the West End into the bargain! A bleedin' shame I calls it.

MRS. MOSS. I tell you what, Liza! My Sam's a-goin' West when 'e comes 'ome to-night. 'E's got to see a big 'air-dressing chap about a new job. 'E can deliver 'em for you, if you like—that is—if you'll pay the bus fare o' course.

LIZA. I'll pay the bus one way.

MRS. MOSS. You'd 'ave to pay it both ways if you went yourself.

LIZA. So would 'e.

MRS. MOSS. Just as you please. Take it or leave it. I only meant to oblige. [She goes to the door.]

LIZA. Oh, very well, I'll pay both ways—this once.

MRS. MOSS. Four pence?

LIZA. Four pence.

MRS. MOSS [to ANNIE]. Just sing out when you're ready, Annie, and I'll come across the landin' and fetch the box. [She goes off right.]

ANNIE. 'Right.

LIZA [clattering about with the tea things]. She'd squeeze money out of a dead rat, she would. Four pence for his fares! And three pence a day for lookin' after you, while I'm a-sweatin' at the factory! And two pence 'ere and five pence there! Gawd! 'Ow is it all goin' to end?

ANNIE. But I'm a-payin' for it out of my own makings!

LIZA. Yus. But you don't pay me for goin' West twice a week and more. What's goin' to 'appen once I'm married and 'ave to get Jack's tea o' nights? Who's goin' to take your bloomin' flowers then—eh? [She starts clearing a corner of the

table for tea—pushing ANNIE's things about rather roughly.] Answer me that, will yer?

ANNIE. Look art! Don't go messin' them petals abart, Liza!

LIZA. Oh, you and your petals! [She gives the things another shove.] 'Selp me Gawd if I'm not fair sick of the sight of 'em.

ANNIE. Liza!

LIZA. Well, why don't you go live at the 'Ome, if you've got to be waited on 'and and foot, and 'ave to 'ave a table size of an 'ouse, that cawn't be touched for fear of upsettin' a few frowzy old petals.

ANNIE [after a pause]. You don't mean it—about the 'Ome, Liza, do you?

LIZA. I do mean it. This cawn't go on after we get married. Jack—'e won't put up with it. Why don't you go back to the 'Ome? They offered to take you again. More'n once, they did.

ANNIE. Yas. And why did I leave it, Liza? 'Cause mother died and you was alone in the world. That's why I left. And now that you're agoin' to get married—now you want to kick me out!

LIZA. Kick you art! Who's said anythin' about kickin'? You know you was 'appy at the 'Ome.

ANNIE. Oh, I was 'appy enough, I know. But it

ain't the same as bein' with you, Liza! [She cries.] It ain't nothink like the same.

LIZA [*kindly*]. There! There! Don't you begin a-cryin' now, Annie. I don't mean a word o' what I says. There! There!

ANNIE [*whimpering*]. Yes—but—

LIZA. Oh, for the love o' eaven stop your sulks! It's all over, d'you 'ear? Wipe your face; and we'll say no more abart it. [She slams the teacups and the bread plate on the table. At the same moment there is a "rat-a-tat-tat" at the door right.]

LIZA. There 'e is now! [Calling out.] Come on in! [She fetches the teapot.]

[JACK enters, the typical jolly East End young workman. His appearance is poor but neat, as he has "cleaned up" and put on his best bright muffler. From under his little cap rolls an immense carefully brushed curl.]

JACK. Whatto girls! Liza! Come kiss me.

LIZA. Oh, garn! Saucy!

JACK. You won't, won't cher? [He grabs her and gives her a good hug and kiss.]

LIZA. Look 'ere, you'll be makin' me spill the tea.

JACK [*pulling her about*]. Tea be blowed, my beauty.

LIZA. Beauty yourself!

JACK. You ain't the first girl to call me that.
[He winks violently at ANNIE.] What do you say, Annie?

LIZA [annoyed]. Oh, chuck it! Chuck it! Sit down and take your tea or we'll never get to the Brit. I've got to change me bodice, too—you've made yourself so grand.

JACK [drawing up a chair to the table and sitting down]. I likes to give folks a treat when I goes out. [To ANNIE.] Well, and 'ow's our little pet tonight?

ANNIE [who has quite recovered, putting aside her work]. Oh, I'm all right.

LIZA [handing a cup to ANNIE]. Ain't much of a tea. Thought of getting some dabs. And then I says to myself: "There ain't much sense in splashin' about the 'oof. We ain't got none too much for the weddin' as it is."

JACK. No. It's that strike what done it. If it 'adn't been for that, we might 'ave 'ad a regular slap-up weddin', you and me. [He drinks his tea disconsolately.]

LIZA. Never you mind, Jack. I don't give a blow. [She sits down.]

JACK. Oh, yes, you do. And what's wuss I do, too, Liza. There ain't a bloke in the street what ain't 'ad 'is weddin' right and proper like. And they've always give me as much to drink as I could 'old—and more! And 'ere now, when it's my turn—blimy—what can I do for 'em? Not a blasted thing.

LIZA. We'll 'ave three pound between us, Jack, come next Saturday.

JACK. Three pound? And what's three pound! At Dick Facer's weddin' we finished off nine quid o' the wet, and only twenty-two of us. All beer, no spirits, mind ye—nothink but beer. Three pound! Lord love a duck! It makes me fair sick to think of it, it does. Three pound!

LIZA. You don't think of puttin' it off again, do you?

JACK. Put it off? What's the use? I might go savin' up as I did this time. And there'd be another one of them 'ere bloody strikes. And then where'd we be? No. I don't want no puttin' off. No more do you, Liza, do you?

LIZA. No, I don't. [She rises and punches him affectionately in the chest.] You go on with your supper. I'm going to wash up a bit. [She crosses to the

washstand and starts undoing her bodice behind, her back to the audience, revealing a terrible pair of stays beneath.]

JACK. I don't dare show my mug in the street no more. 'Struth! I can't look a single pal o' mine in the eye: a three-pound weddin'.

ANNIE [gently]. It's crool, Jack. Downright crool! Wish I could 'elp you. Only, you see business ain't been——

LIZA [from the washstand]. Annie, where's the comb?

ANNIE. I broke it. This morning I broke it a-combing of my 'air.

LIZA. That makes the second this month!

ANNIE. I cawn't 'elp it. My 'air, you see—'s——

LIZA. Oh, you and your everlastin' 'air! I'll 'ave to get you a cast-iron rake next! [Goes off to the right, apparently opening a door, is heard to shout.] Mrs. Moss! Mrs. Moss! Got a comb? Yus, a comb. 'Old on! I'll come acrost to you. [She reappears, takes her better bodice off a hook and a little shiny hat.] Charge me a fiver for that, she will. You wait and see. [She goes off to the right.]

[There is a slight pause. ANNIE evidently is embarrassed in JACK's presence. She finishes

her tea and puts the cup aside; then starts in working again.]

ANNIE. 'Elp yourself if you want any more.

JACK. Right ho!

[*He takes out his ha'penny paper and looks over the sporting news, quite forgetting ANNIE's existence.*]

Flying Fish? Suppose I put a half a dollar on Flying Fish to-morrer?

ANNIE. 'Ave you got much luck bettin' on the 'osses?

JACK. No. Nor never did.

ANNIE. Then why do you bet?

[JACK reads, not hearing her.]

Why d'you bet, Jack?

[JACK grunts an "Eh?" but goes on reading.

ANNIE works in silence after a disgusted glance at JACK.]

JACK [looking up]. D'yousay anythink?

ANNIE [pointedly]. No. Nothink.

JACK. Oh! Thought you did. [He watches her work.] Them's very pretty, them roses.

ANNIE [pleased]. Like 'em?

JACK. Yus. You do work quick.

ANNIE. Got to. Got to get 'em done. Mr.

Moss is takin' 'em for me, seein' as Liza's off with you for the evenin'.

JACK [*taking out his pipe*]. Liza takes 'em most times, don't she?

ANNIE. Yas. She does.

[*A slight pause while he lights his pipe.*]

ANNIE. Jack!

JACK [*puffing at his pipe*]. Um?

ANNIE. When you're married, you won't mind Liza takin' 'em—my flowers.

JACK. Not when it don't interfere.

ANNIE. But it might—might 'ave to interfere—sometimes.

JACK. Then she cawn't take 'em. I told 'er so straight the other day.

ANNIE. Oh, she's bin a-talkin' to you abart it?

JACK. Yus. When she talked about you goin' back to the 'Ome.

ANNIE. Oh, she's been talkin' about me going back to the 'Ome, 'as she?

JACK. She thinks you'd be more comfortable like at the 'Ome.

ANNIE. Comfortable! Comfortable! O' course I'd be more comfortable, only—— [*After a pause.*] Jack—will you—will you tell me somethink?

JACK. Well?

ANNIE. No. But promise first you'll tell me straight—will you?

JACK. Tell you straight—what?

ANNIE. Do you—do you think there's any chance for me?

JACK. Chance?

ANNIE. I mean—you know—chance like—like you and Liza?

JACK [amazed]. Oh. You mean—get married? You?

ANNIE. Yas. D'you think some feller might come along and care for me? Some pal o' yours per'aps. They come up sometimes you know to touch me for luck. Do you?

JACK [*a smile of ridicule comes to his face. He sees ANNIE's anxious eyes and puts his hand over his mouth, coughing awkwardly.*] Well—er—er—

ANNIE. You're a-laughin'!

JACK. No, no, Annie. 'Selp me Bob I ain't.

ANNIE. Well?

[JACK looks at her bewildered, not knowing what to say.]

ANNIE [realizing what he thinks]. You don't—I thought per'aps me 'air. And me face ain't so bad, is it, Jack?

JACK. No. Your face ain't bad at all.

ANNIE. It's the rest——?

JACK. Well, if you *must* know——

ANNIE. Yes. I want to know——

JACK. Well! It *is* the rest.

ANNIE [*wearily*]. I thought so.

JACK [*embarrassed, kindly*]. Well, you see it's like this. A man's got to 'ave a wife what can be on the 'op, don't 'e? There's a deal to do: cookin' and washin' and all that. A pretty face and a mop of 'air, they don't count for much in the long run, you see.

ANNIE. O' course, I see. There'll never be nobody for me; that's what you mean?

JACK. No. I don't suppose so, Annie.

ANNIE [*desperately*]. Jack! [After a pause.] You won't tell Liza about what I've arst you, will yer?

JACK [*surprised*]. For why?

ANNIE. I dunno—— You won't? There she is, now. Promise?

JACK. If you ain't a queer old-fashion' lot!

ANNIE [*pleading*]. Jack?

JACK. Awright. Awright. Don't you worry yourself.

[LIZA reënters in her best bodice and hat, dressed to go out.]

JACK [jumping up rather relieved]. We'll be late, old stick-in-the-mud.

LIZA. Well—who's a-dawdlin'? Me or you?

JACK [taking her arm affectionately to give her a rough hug]. Oh, you—

LIZA. Now then! Stow it! Stow it! Goo'-night, Annie.

ANNIE. Don't spend all the cash. Leave a bit for nex' week.

JACK. For the won'erful three-pound weddin'—eh? Come along! Let's 'op it! [He turns quickly, grabs LIZA by the chin and kisses her.] Got you that time! [He hurries off to the right.

LIZA [immensely pleased]. Garn, yer soppy date!
[She follows him quickly.

[ANNIE sits a moment looking after them, then sighs. Then looks thoughtfully at her hair, a lock of which has fallen over her shoulders. She strokes it, then stops as if coming to a sudden decision.]

ANNIE [calling out]. Mrs. Moss! Mrs. Moss!

MRS. MOSS'S VOICE [in the distance]. Yes, dearie!

ANNIE [*calling out*]. Come over 'ere a minute, will yer?

MRS. MOSS'S VOICE. Awright, dearie! I'm com-in'.

[*As a door is heard to open in the distance ANNIE looks about again with indecision. She gets nervous at Mrs. Moss's approach.*]

MRS. MOSS [*entering*]. Well, dearie—what is it?

ANNIE. It's—— What did you say your husband could get for my 'air? Ten quid?

MRS. MOSS. Per'aps more, per'aps less. Why?

ANNIE. Enough to give Liza a slap-up weddin'?

MRS. MOSS. Lord 'a' mercy! You ain't agoin' to cut it off to give them a weddin'!

ANNIE. Why not? 'Twon't be of much use to me once I'm back in the 'Ome.

MRS. MOSS. You're going back to the 'Ome?

ANNIE. Yas. There's nothink else for the likes o' me. Just makin' flowers, that's all. So——
[*She hands her the scissors.*]

MRS. MOSS. You mean it? [*Taking hold of a strand of her hair.*]

ANNIE. Yas. Go on! Cut 'em orf! [*Murmuring.*] There'll never be no prince for me.

MRS. MOSS [*engrossed in dividing the tresses*].
What d'you say?

ANNIE. Oh, nothink.

[MRS. MOSS cuts into the hair. ANNIE closes her eyes, wincing at the sound. The unfinished flower trembles on its wire stalk in her hand.]

Curtain

SCENE III: *The stockade of a fur hunter's hut in the far east of Siberia. At the back a stockade about ten feet high runs from right to left. It is made of huge pine-tree trunks. In the centre of this stockade a rough door, opening in, and hinged on the right side. To the left, within the stockade, a rude shed with a door which opens out. In this the furs are stored. On the inside of the door, nailed to it with one or two nails, a fine sable skin. A barrel or two and a box to the left. Some fishing nets are hanging up to dry. Beyond the stockade, a wild landscape of pines and larches and in the distance a jagged mountain peak.*

YERMAK, a Finnish boy of sixteen, with a rough, good-natured face, is standing near the shed. Just inside of the shed LOUKA, a heavy young fellow with a red face, thin moustache, and small evil-looking eyes.

He is a half-Russian, half-Finnish peasant. Both men are dressed in the Russian fashion: blouses with belts, top boots, and round caps with peaks. LOUKA is handing bundles of skins to YERMAK, who is trying to take more than he can manage and consequently drops them all.

LOUKA. Take care, you fool! What are you trying to do?

YERMAK [*gathering the skins up again*]. Trying to carry 'em, of course.

LOUKA. Nice way to go about it. What d'you think they're worth? A kopek apiece?

[IVAN's voice is heard in the distance outside of the stockade to the left: "Yermak! Yermak!"]

YERMAK [*calling*]. Here!

IVAN. Hurry up with those skins! There's no time to lose.

YERMAK. I'm coming. Is that the lot?

LOUKA. No. Come back for the rest.

[YERMAK goes off through the door in the stockade and disappears to the left. LOUKA throws out a few more skins, then comes out of the shed mumbling: "There!" He stops, looks off to the left, then goes to the stockade door and

looks off left to see whether any one is looking. Then comes back and going to the right, he raps on a window (which is out of sight) and says.]

Come out of the house a moment. I want to see you. Quick. [He goes again to the stockade door to reassure himself, then moves down to the door by the shed humming.]

Climb up on the stove,
Akouлина, my love,
And let us be warm together.

[ANNA enters from the right. She is a healthy, red-faced peasant girl of twenty-three. She wears a loose print bodice and a short skirt, rough boots, and a bright print handkerchief tied tightly under her chin. She is knitting a thick stocking.]

ANNA. Well? What is it?

LOUKA. Come here! What about this skin? [He points to the skin, but evidently this is merely an excuse to get ANNA to come to him.] Didn't he say something about keeping it?

ANNA. I don't know what—[with sarcasm]—"he" said. And—[with a look at LOUKA]—what's more I don't care.

LOUKA [*catching her eye, with a laugh*]. Oh, you don't care? You don't care what anybody says, I suppose? Eh?

ANNA [*looking him full in the eye*]. I didn't say that.

[LOUKA puts his arm around her with a quick gesture, drawing her toward him.]

ANNA [*pushes him away, in a whisper*]. For God's sake! Louka!

LOUKA. I've looked. It's all right. [*Pleading*.] Just one!

ANNA. No! No! He'll be going in a few minutes. Can't you wait?

LOUKA. No, I can't.

ANNA. You must—that's all.

LOUKA. Five entire days, Anna! Five entire days! You don't know what it's been like for me!

ANNA. And for me! What do you think!

LOUKA [*taking her hand passionately*]. Ha! Ha! Has it? Has it?

ANNA [*smiling at him, as she yields to him*]. Ha! [IVAN's voice is heard near: "Louka! Louka!"

ANNA and LOUKA separate quickly—ANNA going over to the left, LOUKA busying himself

with the furs, humming: Climb up on the stove, etc. IVAN enters by the stockade door. He is a man of thirty-five. His face is keen and intellectual, but shows traces of suffering. His hair, which he wears slightly long, is prematurely gray; so is a small straggling moustache and a thin beard. His manner is enthusiastic, but very nervous. He is, in fact, the antithesis of LOUKA—being far more of the spirit than of the flesh. His costume is Russian and he wears a round fur cap. He is busy cleaning and oiling his gun.]

IVAN. Louka! You haven't put that sable with the others?

LOUKA [pointing to the door]. No! It's still on the door.

IVAN. Good! [Turning to ANNA with a smile.] We're not going to sell that, Annoushka, are we?

ANNA. How should I know, little father?

IVAN. How should you know? Because if I've told you once, I've told you a dozen times. That's the sable I trapped the day our little Vanitchka was born.

ANNA. Oh, that's that sable, is it?

IVAN. Yes. And when I get to the village I'm going to take it to the tailor. And he shall make a cap of it. And when the winter comes little Vanitchka shall wear it! Just think of his rosy face peeping out of the dark fur! Ha! Ha!

ANNA [*mumbling*]. A sheepskin cap would do quite as well.

[*YERMAK reënters. LOUKA gives him the rest of the furs.*]

IVAN. What do you say?

ANNA [*going and looking at the skin*]. Nothing. Only this is a very fine skin, Ivan.

IVAN. One of the finest I ever caught. Do you see the pretty little marks on it? Quite unusual.

ANNA. You could get sixty roubles for this skin.

IVAN. Oh, easily! But never fear. I won't sell it. It shall be Vanitchka's.

ANNA. But sixty roubles, Ivan!

IVAN. What does it matter? Haven't I forty-six sables to take to the traders? Think of that! And squirrels, how many did we count, Louka?

LOUKA. Eight hundred and something.

IVAN. Over eight hundred. And red foxes?

LOUKA. Seventy-three.

IVAN. D'you hear that, Anna? I swear there

isn't another trapper in the whole of Siberia, not one, has done better this year—you wait till Yermak and I land our raft at the village. Won't your father be surprised!

YERMAK [*giving a foolish giggle*]. Won't he?

[*He goes off with the other furs to the left.*]

IVAN. Louka! Just help Yermak with those skins. See he packs them away properly in the chest.

LOUKA. Yes, I'd better. Or he'll drop half of 'em in the river. He's such a fool! [LOUKA *goes off*.]

IVAN. I won't be away very long, Anna. Not longer than I can help, my love, you may trust me for that.

ANNA. How long do you think?

IVAN. A week; perhaps ten days.

ANNA. No longer?

IVAN [*laughing*]. There's a pretty thing for a wife to say. And after two short years of married life, too.

ANNA. Closer on three.

IVAN. Only two since we left the village though. I don't count that first year we lived with your father and mother and brothers, all under the same roof. It's only since we've been up here—[*with a long breath and sweeping gesture*—here—that life has really begun for us.

ANNA [*dryly*]. I liked the village. There were people in the village—

IVAN. People! Thank God there are no people here. That's the wonderful part about it: no people!

[ANNA *shrugs her shoulders.*]

You'd say so, too, Anna, if you'd been locked up for fourteen endless years—the same faces, the same talk, the same despair, morning, noon, and night.

ANNA. I dare say. I've never been in prison.

IVAN. No, heaven be praised, you haven't. You can't imagine what it's like—the freedom here, the unbounded freedom of it all!

ANNA. Of course it's good to be free. Any fool knows that.

IVAN. Oh, it isn't only just being free. You can't understand. It's when I go into the woods to trap and hunt. That's when I feel it most. Hundreds and hundreds of miles between me and all that horror. Nothing but rocks and pines and mountains—only now and then the hooting of a cuckoo—to make the silence all the more silent. I can't help it—I—often I have to cry, Anna—I feel so—so at peace at last—so wonderfully happy.

ANNA. No. I confess I can't understand: crying because you're happy? I never!

IVAN [*continuing*]. And then the strangest thing of all, Anna. You know all those old ideas seem so far away now.

ANNA. What old ideas?

IVAN. Those ideas for which I was ready to give up everything. And did give up everything—when I was a student—— Helping the masses. Fighting for the rights of the people. Setting Russia free! Here, in the face of these—these mountains here—all that seems almost—futile.

ANNA. Futile? What's futile?

IVAN. Useless. Childish.

ANNA. Oh!

IVAN. Of course they're bound to win. In the long run, they're bound to. But why try to knock over the existing order of things? The masses must help themselves. We Intellectuals, we can't do anything for them—not really.

ANNA. Well, that's clear enough, isn't it? Every time you try to do something the police comes and locks you up. And you're sent into exile the way you were. It doesn't take fourteen years in a Siberian prison to find that out.

IVAN. Yes, but to think that I—I with all my theories, my enthusiasm, should have come to this.

Who would have thought it! You know I sometimes wonder. Do you think it's weakness? That prison has broken me? Have I suffered too much? Or am I—am I merely too happy, Annoushka? [He takes her tenderly by the arm.] What is it?

ANNA. Take care! You'll make me drop a stitch.

IVAN. A stitch! [Chaffingly.] That's more important, of course, than solving problems in psychology.

ANNA. Well, you can't do without stockings, can you?

IVAN. You're right. It *is* more important. Stockings! Food! Children! Life—— Life itself. That's the important thing to you! And the important thing to me now. The rest is—— [He snaps his fingers, then sets down his gun.] D'you know, Anna—you—you're part and parcel of it here. Nature—absolute, unspoilt nature—that's what you are!

ANNA. Oh, I'm nature, am I? What next?

IVAN. Ha! Ha! I believe that's why I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. You're so splendidly wholesome, so entirely of the earth.

ANNA. I don't know what you're talking about with your nature and earth.

IVAN. Thank Heaven you don't! And don't you ever try to know. You're mine and the mother of my child—that's quite enough. [He tries to embrace her.] More than enough!

ANNA. Oh, go away with you! [She pushes him away.] Sometimes I think you must be mad! Such things you say!

IVAN [*laughs and tries to embrace her again*]. Ha! Ha! You're wonderful!

ANNA. No! Go away! Let me be, Ivan Ivano-vitch.

LOUKA *reënters by the stockade door.*

LOUKA [*standing in the doorway*]. Everything is ready on the raft.

ANNA [*to IVAN*]. Then you better be leaving, or you won't get down to the next post before it's dark, and you'll have to put it off till to-morrow.

IVAN [*to LOUKA*]. Sounds as if she wanted to get rid of me, doesn't it?

LOUKA [*confused*]. I don't know.

ANNA [*to IVAN*]. Don't be a fool! You know if you don't get to the village by Saturday you'll miss the best traders. And then what'll be the good of all your skins?

IVAN. There! I was only teasing you.

ANNA. I don't like to be teased.

IVAN. I'll run and kiss the boy good-bye, and get my papers.

[*He goes off to the right with a smile at ANNA.*

ANNA [*calling after him*]. Don't wake him up now.

[*Mumbling.*] Only just got him off to sleep—the brat!

LOUKA. Funny his saying that about getting rid of him, wasn't it?

ANNA. Oh, he says a lot of things. He makes me sick with his talk. Called me all sorts of names just now. Nature! And that I was of the dirt, he said. [She goes and stands by LOUKA on the outer side of the open door, so screening herself from the house.]

LOUKA. Called you dirt, did he, the dirty swine?

ANNA. Yes. And the mother of his child—which I knew without being told, worse luck! Wish to God I wasn't!

LOUKA [*smiling at her*]. Do you?

ANNA. Yes—of course. Wish to God I'd never set eyes on him. And that my parents hadn't made me take him—the Intellectual! To have to bear children to a man like him, that talks and talks and cries when he's happy! Cries! Did you ever hear

the like! And not even drunk. For he's never drunk! Never! He won't even let me get drunk on Sundays, the beast!

LOUKA [*taking her hands*]. Don't you worry! He'll be going now. And we'll get nice and drunk together! This afternoon if you like! The entire week.

ANNA. Yes! And at the end of the week? What then? He'll be back again then; remember last winter? And we hadn't begun then--you and I. It wasn't till after the child was born, remember. What are we going to do?

[IVAN reënters quietly from the house, unobserved by ANNA and LOUKA, as the door screens IVAN from them. He is busy putting some papers in a pocketbook when he hears what ANNA is saying to LOUKA. His first movement is toward his gun. Then he steps behind the door quietly and listens.]

LOUKA. We'll manage it somehow even during the winter. You wait and see.

ANNA. Manage it? How? He can't go on being blind forever? He isn't such an absolute fool.

LOUKA. We'll talk it over while he's away.

ANNA. Yes. You better go down to the raft now

and wait for him there. I shouldn't like to have him see us here together like this.

LOUKA. All right.

[*He runs his hand over her face quickly and goes.*

[*ANNA turns from the door; as she does so IVAN, who has stood behind it, closes and bolts it. ANNA faces IVAN with a little cry. She makes an involuntary movement toward the door, trying to push IVAN out of the way. As she does so she starts to call: "Louka!"*]

IVAN [*quickly clapping his hands over her mouth.*] Scream—and I'll shoot you, by God. Yes, by God, I will. This is between us, d'you hear? Between us! [*He releases her mouth. ANNA gives an inarticulate grunt.*] How long has this been going on? A week? A month? Two? Tell me? [*Taking her roughly by the arm and shaking her.*] I want to know, d'you hear? I want to know—what's the reason for it? What have I done to you that you should do this to me? Answer me.

ANNA. I don't know. I couldn't help it.

IVAN. Couldn't help it?

ANNA. No. I couldn't. I couldn't. I never liked you from the first, with your talking about things I couldn't understand. And your grand

manners and grand ways. They frightened me, and made me feel queer.

IVAN. Grand manners! I've got no grand manners.

ANNA. Well, anyhow, they're not like our manners. Not like, like——

IVAN. Like Louka's you mean.

ANNA. No, they're not. With Louka I know exactly where I stand. With you I never do.

IVAN. And yet you married me, Anna.

ANNA. I married you because they told me to. I didn't want you. But they said, "You must. He's an Intellectual, a Political. He's had his pardon signed by the Tsar himself." And they talked to me, all of them, my father, my mother, every one, till I said "yes" to you. That's how I married you.

IVAN. And now you love this—this creature.

ANNA [furiously]. He's not a creature. Just because you pay him to work, that makes him no worse than you.

IVAN. Oh, it's not that. It's because he's stolen——

ANNA [fiercely]. I won't listen to a word against him, d'you hear? I love him.

IVAN [after a pause, darkly]. Yes. I see you do.

ANNA. What are you going to do to him?

IVAN. What can I do to him? And what can I do to you, for that matter? There's nothing to be done. It's too late.

ANNA. You're not going to shoot him?

IVAN. Shoot him?

ANNA. And you're not going to beat me?

IVAN. What's the good?

ANNA [*in utter amazement*]. And you call yourself a man?

IVAN [*realizing the hopelessness of her point of view*]. Oh, Anna! Anna! [After a pause.] Listen to me, Anna. You and I we're hundreds of miles apart! Generations! Centuries. That's the whole trouble with us two. Merely that. That's all.

ANNA. I don't love you—that's the whole trouble.

IVAN. Yes. Because I don't beat you and blow out Louka's brains, you don't love me. That's the kind of man I ought to have been, the kind of man you want. I see that now.

ANNA. Oh, you see that at last, do you?

IVAN. Yes. Very clearly, suddenly. I see that. To think I could ever have imagined myself the right mate for you. How ridiculous it seems now.

ANNA. I could have told you, the very first night of our marriage. The way you kissed me. Didn't you feel how I hated it?

IVAN. I never noticed, Anna. You see I loved you.

[ANNA makes a gesture of denial.]

Oh, yes, Anna. And I do yet, Anna.

ANNA. What? Now? After you've found out? You disgust me.

IVAN [*he looks at her long*]. And a moment ago I thought myself happy. So happy that I even denied my past! All those years that I had given to the cause. All my youth—— My ideals! It serves me right——

ANNA. Well! What's going to happen?

IVAN. Exactly. What *is* going to happen?

ANNA. We can't go on like this.

IVAN. No. We can't. And yet we're bound to each other, aren't we? That's the worst of it—bound together for life.

ANNA. You mean because, as the priest said at the altar, we're man and wife "for the rest of our days?"

IVAN. Oh, the marriage! The marriage! I'm not thinking of that. I'm thinking of the child in

there; your child and mine. It's that that binds us and holds us together. If it weren't for that, I'd say let's end it here and now. And I'd turn my back, and you'd never see me again.

ANNA. You mean it's on account of the boy—because he happens to be your child, that you won't?

IVAN. Yes.

ANNA [after a pause]. Well, he isn't *your* child.

IVAN. Anna!

ANNA [meeting his eye calmly]. No!

IVAN [breathlessly]. You swear it?

ANNA. I swear it. I'll swear it on the child's head, if you like. Before the Ikon.

IVAN [looking down, his breast heaving]. Not even that! So from the very start almost—— And I thought that with you—here—I was living my life at last! Ha! Ha! Ah! [Wearily putting his hands before his eyes.] God! Dear God! [He leans against the door of the shed resting his forehead against the patch of sable. There is a knock on the stockade door.]

LOUKA'S VOICE [outside]. Ivan Ivanovitch! You must go now, if you're going at all.

IVAN [looking up, realizing the significance of the words]. Do you hear that?

[ANNA has got into a protective attitude at the sound of LOUKA's voice.]

Don't fear! You know I'm not—[with sarcasm]—"a man." [He goes and opens the door.]

LOUKA enters.

IVAN. Come in. [A slight pause.] Yes, I've found out.

[LOUKA looks questioningly at ANNA.]

ANNA [nodding]. Yes.

[LOUKA is also at once on the defensive, his hand going to his knife.]

IVAN [with a weary gesture]. No! No! No use! I'm going away. You'll never see me again either of you. Take everything that's here. It's yours! House—land—everything! Everything—[his eyes fall on the little skin on the door]—except— [He pulls off the skin and throws it to YERMAK in the door.] Here! Take that! Put it with the other skins—for sale! And make loose the raft!

[YERMAK catches the skin and disappears.]

[To ANNA.]

It won't be long before you can marry, if you like. For I'm going back to the life I've always belonged to. Back to Russia! To help once more in the

fight for freedom! They make quick work of us when they catch us a second time! So, you see—

[*He turns and goes out by the door. ANNA and LOUKA stand silently staring before them.*]

Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I: *The showroom at JACQUELIN'S, the dress-maker.* At the back, two steps up, an arch with a black velvet curtain drawn across it. Through this curtain come the mannequins. To the right a large double door leading to the entrance hall. Above it a table with samples of delicate underwear and a hat or two on stands. To the left two long windows, between them a "chiffonier," and by the upper window a low desk with ledgers, etc. A telephone stands above it on a Chippendale "pillar stand." A considerable number of small gilt chairs are placed about the room. The room is lighted by electric brackets.

ANNE, of the opening scene of the play, is sitting to the left. She is dressed in a fashionable afternoon dress and hat. Next to her sits SIR CHARLES, a stout man of fifty-five, with a rosy face verging on apoplexy. He has the manners and appearance of a retired colonel, blunt and obvious, with a port-wine voice. Almost in the centre of the stage, with her back

to the audience, sits a stout old woman, LADY APPLEBY, very much bepainted and arranged, and a thin languid youth, the HON. PETER WITHERS. MISS SYLVIA, a saleswoman, about thirty, rather worn and tired, smartly gowned, stands near ANNE. MISS MADELEINE, another saleswoman, stands behind LADY APPLEBY'S chair. Two ladies and a saleswoman are grouped nearer the arch to the left. The mannequins are parading.

At the rise of curtain, a very tall striking girl, MESSALINE, comes out through the curtains and walks about the room. She is wearing an evening dress with an elaborate cloak and headdress.

LADY APPLEBY [*leaning over to HON. PETER*].
Peter—what do you think of that?

PETER [*drawling, languidly*]. Of course, I think it's quite too terribly divine.

LADY APPLEBY. Yes, Peter. But do you think for me?

PETER. Why not, my dear?

LADY APPLEBY. But what would Appleby say?

PETER. Your husband? I always forget you're married.

LADY APPLEBY. So do I, sometimes!

PETER. Then why not *this* time? [To the saleswoman.] What's the name of that dress?

MADELEINE. That, sir? That's called "Danger Ahead."

PETER [to LADY APPLEBY]. Oh, you must have "Danger Ahead." I'm just dying for you to have "Danger Ahead." Say you will, for my sake? Will you?

LADY APPLEBY [making eyes at him]. I'll think it over—just a little longer.

PETER. Of course I think you're quite too deliciously cruel. [He rises and goes over to the table where the underwear is and plays about with it. Another mannequin appears. This time TROTTINETTE, a "petite" Frenchy girl in a glittering pink and red evening frock.]

SIR CHARLES [to ANNE]. I say, how many more of these young women have they got in stock?

ANNE. Are you getting bored, Sir Charles?

SIR CHARLES. Bored with young women, dear lady? I?

ANNE. I thought they might possibly amuse you.

SIR CHARLES. Of course they amuse me. Never saw such a parade, anywhere. And I've seen a few

parades—*everywhere*. Now what might this one be called? [Turning to the saleswoman.]

SYLVIA. This dress, Sir Charles?

SIR CHARLES. No, the girl.

SYLVIA. We call her Trottinette.

SIR CHARLES. Trottinette. Not bad! Not bad! Sounds rather like a two-year-old, don't it?

SYLVIA. And the dress "Red Mullet."

SIR CHARLES. "Red Mullet!" Never heard anything so damn silly in all my life. "Red Mullet," indeed.

SYLVIA [*in a surprised tone*]. We're calling a lot of gowns after dishes this season, Sir Charles. There's Vol-au-Vent. And Ris-de-veau! And Petits Pois. And Soufflé.

SIR CHARLES. I suppose you'll be having tripe and onions next.

ANNE [*laughing to please SIR CHARLES*]. Ha! Ha! Really, Sir Charles! You mustn't! It's a most serious business, the naming and launching of a new dress. Quite as serious as the naming and launching of a battleship, I assure you.

SIR CHARLES. No doubt! No doubt! [Eying her.] Quite as fatal an engine of destruction at any rate.

ANNE. Really, Sir Charles! Ha! Ha! I wonder what you'll say to "my destroyer" for your dinner to-night?

SIR CHARLES. A new one?

ANNE. The very latest. Entirely in your honor. Would you like to see it now? Do you think we might, Miss Sylvia? Or has the dress gone home?

SYLVIA. I'll just find out. [She goes off by the little door in the archway down right.]

LADY APPLEBY [rising, in a whining tone]. Peter! Aren't you coming back to me? I think it's horrible the way you neglect me for those nighties. [She goes over to the table and joins PETER. MADELEINE follows her. A beautiful mannequin, PSYCHE, has appeared, dressed in a perfect, classic gown. She comes and poses in front of SIR CHARLES and ANNE.]

SIR CHARLES. And what might you be called, miss?

PSYCHE [in a terrible cockney]. Psoichee.

SIR CHARLES. Psoichee? Oh, Psyche. Quite so.

ANNE. And the dress?

PSYCHE. Paygan Maiyde.

SIR CHARLES. What?

PSYCHE [unmoved]. Paygan Maiyde.

ANNE [translating]. Pagan Maid.

SIR CHARLES. Oh, I see. Yes—yes.

[*The girl has gone on and is stopped and her dress examined by LADY APPLEBY.*]

ANNE. Some of these charming creatures might reverse the usual order of things, and learn to talk before they learn to walk, don't you think?

SIR CHARLES [*puzzled for a moment*]. Usual order? Talk before they walk? Ah, yes. Ha! Ha! Very good! Very good!

ANNE [*looking across through the glass doors*]. Look, Sir Charles!

SIR CHARLES. Where?

ANNE. There! Through the glass doors! In the hall. I told you Mrs. Collisson would follow us. I was convinced of it when she spoke to us at the Club.

[*MRS. COLLISSON enters from the right. She is a very thin woman of thirty, with a face that she paints a livid white. Her hair and eyes are dark. Her whole manner and voice are cultivated to arouse intense compassion and sympathy. A sweet, sad smile hovers carefully on her lips. ANNE and MRS. COLLISSON detest each other, hence their manner to each other is more than polite.*]

MRS. COLLISSON [*sweetly*]. We meet again!

ANNE [*sweetly*]. Yes. What a coincidence, dear Norah.

MRS. COLLISSON [*very sweetly, but firmly*]. Yes, isn't it, dear Anne! [To SIR CHARLES.] You know, Sir Charles, I wouldn't do this for anybody else in the whole world.

SIR CHARLES. Do what, dear lady?

MRS. COLLISSON. With my wretched constitution! Risk my life like this by coming to a fitting. If it weren't *your* dinner to-night——

SIR CHARLES. Oh, are you getting a frock here, too, for to-night? I'm most flattered.

MRS. COLLISSON [*pretending surprise, turning round to ANNE*]. Are *you*, dear Anne?

ANNE. Yes, dear Norah! Didn't you know?

MRS. COLLISSON. How should I? You never tell me a thing, you funny, secretive little mouse. I only hope it isn't the same dress.

ANNE [*horrified*]. What?

MRS. COLLISSON [*to MADELEINE, calmly*]. Are you ready for me?

MADELEINE. Quite, Madam.

MRS. COLLISSON [*to SIR CHARLES, with a look*]. Till to-night, then—if I survive. [She goes off by the small door, followed by MADELEINE.]

[Another mannequin enters, ROSAMUND, tall and mediæval in type, with a trailing "Gothic" gown, and a strange cap of gold. She goes first to LADY APPLEBY's corner, the latter examining her dress very closely.]

ANNE [looking after MRS. COLLISSON]. Oh! The cat! She's ordered the same dress, of course! That's what she's done.

[SYLVIA reënters by the door right, followed by a fitter, a woman of about thirty. The latter carries the dress covered with a piece of muslin.]

ANNE [very agitated, turning to her]. Miss Sylvia! Mrs. Collisson's not having my dress? Mr. Jacquelain swore he hadn't made it for another soul, that I should be the very first.

SYLVIA. No, no, of course not, Madam.

ANNE. You're positive?

SYLVIA. Quite. I only wish he were here himself to reassure you.

ANNE. Yes. It's too provoking he should be away. I telephoned this morning I was bringing Sir Charles.

SYLVIA. Mr. Jacquelain'll be very sorry. But as I was telling you, Her Royal Highness commanded

him to come. You see it's a question which one of three firms is to do the Princess's trousseau. So he had to go, hadn't he? [She turns and indicates to the fitter where to place the box with the dress.]

ANNE. I suppose so. [To SIR CHARLES, aside.] I wanted you to see him. He's quite impossible, of course. His real name's Jacobs, I believe. Started from nothing. But he's as clever as they make 'em. Bubbling over with ideas.

SYLVIA [looking through the glass doors]. Oh, here's Mr. Jacquelin now.

[MR. JACQUELIN enters by the door right. At a glance one can see that he is of the half-English, half-Jewish type--but inclined more toward the Jewish in feature and coloring. He is most carefully overdressed. A very "waisty" morning coat, white spats, a gardenia, an elaborate tie, and a tightly curled moustache. His manner is impudent, cringing, clever, caddish, and brilliant. His voice is very soft when talking to the customers, but hard and bullying when talking to the girls. As he enters he takes off his top hat and spotless white gloves. These with his stick he hands vaguely to the BUTTONS and SYLVIA, who take

*them without any acknowledgment on his part.
The moment he comes into the room all the
saleswomen and mannequins assume a much
more eager, interested manner.]*

JACQUELIN [*coming to ANNE*]. So sorry! So dreadfully sorry, Madam. I tried to get back sooner—simply impossible! Her Royal Highness— [Handing his second glove, SYLVIA lets it drop. JACQUELIN turning round gruffly to her.] Can't you look? [*Turning again to ANNE in his best manner as before.*] Her Royal Highness wouldn't let me go! Such a bore!

ANNE. I've brought Sir Charles. I told you I would some day.

[SIR CHARLES *half bows.*]

JACQUELIN [*bobbing*]. Awfully good of you, Sir Charles, to come and have a look at Jacquelin's. [*He pronounces it in the French way.*] I'm afraid you're not seeing the place under the best of conditions.

SIR CHARLES. Not at all. Not at all. Think 'em charming, all of 'em—these pretty little hussies of yours: Red Mullett and Sausage, and the rest.

JACQUELIN. Oh, they're nothing—the ones you've seen. Remnants! I carried off the best of 'em to

Her Royal Highness. Quite took the exalted lady's fancy, they did. Would you believe it? She'd never set eyes on mannequins before.

SIR CHARLES. No.

JACQUELIN. 'Pon my word. The two other firms had done the same old thing, of course—silly blighters!—[pulling himself up]—if I may use a vulgar term. Propped up their bedraggled gowns on chairs and stuffed 'em with tissue paper—like so many hideous corpses.

ANNE. So naturally you got the order?

JACQUELIN. Well, er—— [Coughing.] I always find Royalty singularly—er—deliberate, don't you, Sir Charles? You see my creations are rather—shall we say advanced? What I need is just the right word from some one to be whispered in Her Highness's ear, to make her——

LADY APPLEBY [who has come up to SIR CHARLES]. One moment! I simply must shake hands with you, Sir Charles, before going. You don't remember me, horrid man.

SIR CHARLES [not knowing her at all]. Of course! Of course I do.

LADY APPLEBY [coquettishly]. No! No, you don't—Lady Appleby.

SIR CHARLES. Lady Appleby! Of course.

[They shake hands and talk a few words.]

ANNE [calling over JACQUELIN]. Mr. Jacquelin. A little word of advice.

JACQUELIN. Yes, Madam?

ANNE. Be nice to Sir Charles—particularly nice. He happens to have a great deal of influence with Her Royal Highness. You remember he used to be attached to her household.

JACQUELIN. By Jove! So he was. I say, what luck! Oh, thanks! A thousand thanks for tipping me the wink. [After a quick glance at SIR CHARLES.] He rather er—er—fancies my collection of beauties—[correcting himself]—young ladies, don't he?

ANNE. Why? What do you mean?

JACQUELIN. Oh—nothing, nothing. Merely—I think I can do better for him than what he's seen. That's all.

ANNE [puzzled]. Do better?

[LADY APPLEBY and the HON. PETER have gone off by the big door left. SIR CHARLES returns to the others.]

JACQUELIN. Miss Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Yes, Mr. Jacquelin?

JACQUELIN. Just see if those young ladies are

back from Her Royal Highness's. Let them all go for to-night. [With a smile at SIR CHARLES.] I don't believe in keeping my girls overtime, poor dears! Only ask Anita if she'll oblige. Let her put on—let me see. [Turning to ANNE.] She shall show your model, Madam. Tell her to put on—What did I name it now? Ah, yes! To put on "Take me." [With a very oily voice.] If it's not too much trouble. "Take me."

SYLVIA. Very good, sir.

[She goes off through the curtain at the back.

JACQUELIN. I want you to see her, Sir Charles, if you will. Quite my latest discovery. Only been with us a week. Funny part, she's extraordinary like you, Madam. Of course, not a lady. That goes without saying. And her hair's a touch darker: cendre, old amber, so to speak. But otherwise the resemblance is weird—quite weird. In fact—

BUTTONS enters right.

BUTTONS. You're wanted on the telephone, sir.

JACQUELIN. Say I'm out! D'you hear? Out!

BUTTONS. It's the Duchess of Crowborough, sir. She's at the phone 'erself.

JACQUELIN. Why didn't you say so at once. Am I through?

BUTTONS. Yes, sir.

JACQUELIN [to ANNE and SIR CHARLES]. You'll excuse me. The Duchess! [He goes to the telephone and takes down the receiver.] "Yes, your Grace? Yes? Your dress to-morrow? Without fail, your Grace. Without fail, I say. You may rely on me. Yes. Good-day, your Grace." [He hangs up the receiver and comes back to the others.] Absurd, pretentious creature! Orders a dress one day and expects it the next! What does she think I am? A reach-me-down? She can wait!

ANNE. You're not going to have it ready for her?

JACQUELIN. There's such a thing as preserving one's dignity, ain't there?

ANNE. And what about *my* dress? Will your dignity permit that to be ready?

JACQUELIN. *Your* dress, Madam?

ANNE [pointing to the box]. My dress for to-night.

THE FITTER. Madam wished to see it. It's quite ready.

JACQUELIN [to the fitter, gruffly]. Well, well! What are you waiting for? Show it! Show it! [Impatiently.] You're all thumbs to-day.

[*The fitter takes the dress out of the box, displaying it before ANNE. It is, of course, the same dress as the one of the first scene of the play.*]

Eh? What do you say to that? A dream. An absolute dream, isn't it? D'you catch the style, Sir Charles? Eleventh century! Leaning, as it were, toward the Merovingian!

SIR CHARLES [*quite flustered*]. The Merovingian! Never heard of her.

JACQUELIN. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Of course you have, Sir Charles. Charlemagne and all that crew, you know. Strong ecclesiastic influence. Ultra-modern with a slashed skirt! The very latest scream. Feel that silk, Madam. It's unique, quite unique, believe me! Hand woven. They tried to palm off another piece on me: same color, same design. I had to send it back to Lyons. Wrong—quite wrong! It positively set one's teeth on edge to touch it.

SYLVIA reënters through the curtains.

SYLVIA. Mr. Jacquelin!

JACQUELIN [*to SYLVIA*]. Well?

SYLVIA. Anita's just come back. She'll get ready at once.

JACQUELIN. Right ho.

ANNE. And the lace! Lovely, isn't it, Sir Charles?

SIR CHARLES [*trying to be interested*]. Nottingham,
I suppose.

JACQUELIN [*with a shudder*]. Oh, dear, no, Sir
Charles! Dear, no! Quite three hundred years old.
Venetian! Venetian!

SYLVIA [*timidly*]. Excuse me, Mr. Jacquelin, I
believe it's Dutch.

JACQUELIN. Dutch indeed!

SYLVIA. You see I'm partly Dutch. My grand-
mother had lace very much like that.

JACQUELIN [*brutally*]. Grandmother yourself!
It's Venetian, I tell you. Pure Venetian. You must
be off your chump, Miss Sylvia.

ANNE [*coming to the rescue*]. What a beautiful
rose! Now where do you manage to get flowers like
this, Mr. Jacquelin?

JACQUELIN. Paris, Madam. Only Paris can turn
out blooms as "exquis" as that.

ANNE. And the fur? Funny little markings on
the paws, aren't they?

JACQUELIN. Finest Siberian sable! Wonderfully
—wonderfully—[stroking it]—“tootsie”—isn't it?

SIR CHARLES. Strikes me you have to rummage

all over the world to put a dress together nowadays. Means a lot of work for a lot of people, don't it?

JACQUELIN. Oh, the work is nothing, Sir Charles —nothing! It's the putting together that counts. The rest's easy enough. No effort at all, in fact. You see—it all lies with the artist, not with the materials. The old truth holds good.

MADELEINE *appears at the little door left.*

MADELEINE. Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN [*annoyed at the interruption*]. Yes. What is it? What is it?

MADELEINE. Mrs. Collisson would like you to come upstairs for a moment.

JACQUELIN [*bored*]. Mrs. Collisson? She's here? Oh, Lord!

MADELEINE. She wants some alterations.

JACQUELIN. What, again? Tell her it's quite impossible! Say I'm engaged. Get out of it somehow.

MADELEINE. Very good, sir.

[*She goes off by the little door right.*

JACQUELIN. I never say anything against my patronesses! Never! But really Mrs. Collisson's the limit. She's enough to wear out a regiment.

ANNE [*delighted, but protesting for effect*]. Not Mrs. Collisson?

JACQUELIN. Yes. I mean what I say. She's never satisfied. Never by any chance. Always complaining! Always fussing! And a tongue! And a temper! Well!— [He raises his eyes to heaven.]

ANNE. I can't believe it. Can you, Sir Charles?

SIR CHARLES. You can't mean pale little, frail little Mrs. Collisson?

JACQUELIN. Frail? Pale? If ever there was an ox, it's that woman.

ANNE. But she's such an invalid!

JACQUELIN. All that invalid racket's put on. Believe me, if you want to know what a woman's really like, you've only got to see her at a fitting.

ANNE [*a little too sweetly*]. Come, Mr. Jacquelin, you mustn't betray poor Mrs. Collisson like that. If you take away that invalid pose of hers, how on earth is she going to get on? She has nothing else. It isn't fair of you, Mr. Jacquelin.

MADELEINE *reënters by the little door right.*

MADELEINE. Mrs. Collisson says she won't take the dress. She considers the drapery of it stuffy,

not to say vulgar. She said if you didn't come at once, sir, there'd be trouble.

JACQUELIN. Tell her if she wants trouble she'd better come down here. It's nearer the street. Go! And give her my message word for word.

MADELEINE. Very good, sir.

[*She goes off again by the little door right.*

JACQUELIN. My drapery stuffy! My drapery vulgar! Ha! Ha! And from a pasty-faced creature like that! On her hands and knees I'll have her. On her hands and knees!

ANNE. I'll go! [To SIR CHARLES.] She may come down—and I—I can't bear scenes! Are you coming?

SIR CHARLES. I think I'll stay if you don't mind. I have a reason.

ANNE. Very well, then. Till dinner.

SIR CHARLES. I may as well tell you. It isn't idle curiosity. You know that post that I have something to say about. Well, Collisson's after that. And if his wife is really what Mr.—Mr.—

ANNE [*prompting him*]. Jacquelin—

SIR CHARLES. Mr.—Jacquelin says she is—

ANNE. You wouldn't let a little thing like a wife's temper influence you?

SIR CHARLES. Oh, it's most important what the wife's like, particularly in the case of a post of this kind.

ANNE. But surely, Sir Charles—you must remember poor Mrs. Collisson's nerves are—

SIR CHARLES. I shouldn't plead too much for the Collissons if I were you.

ANNE. Why not?

SIR CHARLES. Perhaps you aren't aware the choice lies between Collisson and your husband.

ANNE [*pretending surprise*]. Really? I never dreamt of such a thing. Neither does John, I'm sure.

SIR CHARLES. Oh! Perhaps he wouldn't care about getting it, then?

ANNE. Care about it! He'd give his eyes to have it, of course. But, of course, he'd sooner die than say so—so should I. We don't believe in going about things in that way, do you?

SIR CHARLES. No, of course not. Naturally. Naturally.

ANNE. In fact, I'm afraid I've said too much as it is. I know John would be furious with me; he is such a dear, modest, retiring soul—like all really competent people. But there! I'd better go before

I say another word. You see I'm not at all diplomatic—unfortunately. [She holds out her hand.]

SIR CHARLES [taking it tenderly]. You're delightful.

ANNE. Good-night, Mr. Jacquelin. [With a final look at SIR CHARLES.] Till dinner then.

[JACQUELIN bows her out by the door right. SYLVIA and the fitter take the box with the dress off by the little door right.]

SIR CHARLES. Charming creature! Charming!

JACQUELIN. The lady! Always the lady! And such an ad. for my business! Wears her dresses like an angel, don't she?

SIR CHARLES [vaguely]. Yes. You don't mind my stopping on for a moment?

JACQUELIN. Sir Charles, honored. Honored! Besides, I'd like you to see that new girl of mine. Anita, I've called her.

SIR CHARLES. Anita—hum! [After a pause, clearing his throat.] Er—er— D'you mind telling me something? Something rather delicate?

JACQUELIN. Not at all, Sir Charles.

SIR CHARLES. Well, you see, I've never been in this kind of place before. These young ladies—these—models you call them—

JACQUELIN. Mannequins.

SIR CHARLES. Mannequins. Tell me—are they all—humph? You follow me?

JACQUELIN. I never inquire into their private lives, naturally. But I'm sure they're all very sensible girls. Know what life really means. And when the right man comes with the right sort of offer—well—they're no fools, of course. They're no fools.

SIR CHARLES [*with intense self-satisfaction*]. The right sort of man! That's of course what I mean. The right sort of man! [*He has got to the table with the underwear and plays about with it to hide his confusion.*] Pretty roundabouts you've got here! Flimsy, naughty stuff, ain't they?

JACQUELIN. Oh, I have some much naughtier ones than those. I always keep 'em locked away. It's for our special clientele.

SIR CHARLES. You don't say so?

JACQUELIN. Would you like to see some of them, Sir Charles?

SIR CHARLES. Would I?

[JACQUELIN crosses to the "chiffonier" between the windows. As he does so MRS. COLLISON reënters by the little door right in a tower-

ing rage. Her languid pose has completely forsaken her. MADELEINE follows with a dress over her arm.]

MRS. COLLISSON [in her anger does not see SIR CHARLES, who is well over to the left behind the table with the underwear, and hidden partly by one or two hats on stands]. What's this message you've sent me about coming downstairs?

JACQUELIN. I thought, Madam, the discussion would be just as pleasant here.

MRS. COLLISSON. I've never been insulted so by any one in all my life—let alone a tradesman!

JACQUELIN. Would you mind telling me what the trouble's about, Madam?

MRS. COLLISSON. What the trouble is! The usual trouble, of course! Look at that dress.

JACQUELIN. Well, what's wrong with it?

MRS. COLLISSON. It's outrageous! Perfectly outrageous! The drapery! The way it's managed! If you could see my figure in it! I look a thousand.

JACQUELIN. If you'll remember, Madam, when you chose it, I suggested that the design might be a trifle—shall we say—young?

MRS. COLLISSON. Young? What do you mean to insinuate?

JACQUELIN. I mean for one as delicate looking as you.

MRS. COLLISSON. Who said I was delicate? And what business is it of yours if I'm delicate or not? You're here to make my frocks. And if you can't, say so, and I'll go elsewhere.

JACQUELIN. I'm always sorry to lose a customer, Madam. But I really think in this case—perhaps it would be simpler for both of us if—

MRS. COLLISSON. You mean you show me the door, do you? Very well—only let me tell you this. You're making a great mistake! A great mistake. Of course you don't know it yet, but my husband has just been offered a most important post.

JACQUELIN. Has he?

MRS. COLLISSON. Yes. And I could have sent you loads of people. Shoals and shoals. Now I shan't. On the contrary, I'll do just the reverse. I shall write to everybody I know about your utter incompetence, and your insolence into the bargain.

JACQUELIN. I shouldn't do that, Madam, or you might land yourself in a libel action. It would be far cheaper in the long run if you just settled the account you've been owing these last three years.

MRS. COLLISSON. Oh, you think because you

happen to be the rage just now, and have a few titled people sitting about your rooms and gaping at the models, like dreary Lady Appleby and ridiculous old Sir Charles——

[SIR CHARLES coughs audibly at the mention of his name. Turning and seeing him.]

Oh—I—thought you had——

SIR CHARLES. I had gone, didn't you? I'm afraid after all this excitement, considering your very delicate state of health, you won't be well enough to come to dinner to-night, will you?

MRS. COLLISON. I—I—— Oh, my head!

[She draws herself up and goes off by the big door left.

SIR CHARLES. Repulsive creature!

JACQUELIN [apologetically to SIR CHARLES]. I'm awfully sorry.

SIR CHARLES. I'm delighted. That settles the post once and for all. [He rubs his hands.] You couldn't have done me a better service.

JACQUELIN. Really, Sir Charles.

SIR CHARLES. Indeed you couldn't.

JACQUELIN. Then—er—ahem—might I ask a little favor in return?

SIR CHARLES. Well?

JACQUELIN. Would you—would you put in one

tiny word for me with Her Royal Highness—perhaps——?

SIR CHARLES. Certainly! Certainly! I'll be only too de—— [Indicating the underwear.] Now about those little—— [He stops short on seeing ANITA, who suddenly appears between the curtains, dressed in a ravishing evening gown. She resembles ANNE, as JACQUELIN said, except for her auburn hair which is partly hidden by a beautiful golden headdress. She poses first on the platform, then comes down the steps slowly in the "mannequin" fashion.]

SIR CHARLES. God bless my soul! [With a satisfied grunt.] God bless my soul!

JACQUELIN [turning to MADELEINE who is still standing with the dress in the right-hand corner]. Miss Madeleine, take that Collisson dress upstairs and mark it for the sale. I don't want to see it again! And tell the young ladies they shan't be needed any more to-night.

MADELEINE. Very good, Mr. Jacquelin.

[She goes off by the little door right.]

JACQUELIN [beckoning to ANITA to come over into the corner left]. Anita! Anita! One moment. There's something not quite right with that sash effect. [He pretends to put the dress in order, mean-

while he whispers to ANITA.] I want you to be very pleasant to Sir Charles. Very pleasant, d'you understand, my dear?

[ANITA gives him a quick glance.]

JACQUELIN [*aloud*]. Now! Just go and show the dress to Sir Charles. [To SIR CHARLES.] You'll excuse me if I scribble a note to the Duchess, Sir Charles. [*He goes up to the desk ostensibly to write a note, but really to leave ANITA alone with SIR CHARLES. From the desk he watches the proceeding carefully. As ANITA approaches SIR CHARLES the latter ogles her eagerly.*]

SIR CHARLES. D'you know you're a damn fine creature, my girl? Do you?

[ANITA goes through her gestures without turning a hair.]

SIR CHARLES. I say. Do you—do you ever sup?

[ANITA looks SIR CHARLES up and down, then turns her back and goes off by the curtains at the back.]

SIR CHARLES [*to JACQUELIN*]. Did you see that? Snubbed, by Gad, snubbed. The little goose, the silly little goose!

JACQUELIN [*coming forward apologetically with some fancy underwear*]. Sir Charles—I—

SIR CHARLES. Charmin' things are happening to me here. Charmin'? A lady insults me behind my back, a shop girl makes a fool of me to my face, and all in the space of less than five minutes.

JACQUELIN [*as before*]. Really, Sir Charles—I—

SIR CHARLES. It's the last time I put my foot in any of your damn dressmaker's establishments. The first and last time. You can take my word for it. Take those damn things away. How dare you show them to me? Good-day to you.

[*He goes off by the door left.*

JACQUELIN [*furiously to himself*]. God! [He stops a moment not knowing what to do, then calls out wildly.] Anita! Anita! Anita! Miss Sylvia! Miss Madeleine! Where in the hell are you all?

[SYLVIA and MADELEINE come hurrying from the small doors right and left.]

JACQUELIN. Can't you come when I call you? Go and fetch Anita for me.

SYLVIA. You wish to speak to her, sir?

JACQUELIN. D'youth suppose I wish to take tea with her? Or sup with her? Eh? Mess me up with Sir Charles, would she? And make me lose the job with Her Royal Highness? By God, I'll— No. [To SYLVIA.] Stop a bit. I'll speak to her in there.

SYLVIA. The young ladies are changing to go home.

JACQUELIN. Don't I know? That's just why: before the lot of 'em—the whole damn lot of 'em. I'll soon settle her hash—the——!

[*He hurries up through the curtains.*

Curtain

SCENE II: *Behind the black curtain through which the mannequins appear. The scene is quite shallow—merely the back of the black curtain and a small door left leading to the dressing-room of the mannequins. Almost in front of it stands a table with materials, pins, some boxes with various bits of trimmings, and a large pair of dressmaker's scissors. The four mannequins in various stages of undress are standing listening eagerly to the row which has been going on at the other side of the curtain. One, PSYCHE, has her ordinary walking dress on, but the bodice is still unbuttoned. Another has on the satin slip over which she has worn her model. Another is practically ready to go home. ANITA, still of course in her evening dress, stands hesitating at the centre of the curtain, PSYCHE holding her back.*

PSYCHE [*in cockney*]. Let 'im call, dearie! 'E's

got one of 'is usuals! It'll blow over in a second or two, and if you go 'e'll only begin to curse you—and then you cawn't tell where—

JACQUELIN *appears between the curtains.*

JACQUELIN [to ANITA]. Can't you come when you're called?

ANITA. I—

PSYCHE. I told 'er not to go.

JACQUELIN. Oh, you did, did you? What business is it of yours? And of the rest of you?

THE THREE OTHERS. We— I— We were only—

JACQUELIN. Listening? Spying—eh? Get out, d'you hear? Or I— [The three others go off through the door left. To PSYCHE.] And you, too. Or—damn you—there'll be fines all round. Take my word for it.

PSYCHE. I ain't afraid o' you. And you know it. I could tell a tale or two. Pretty readin' they'd make in the evening specials. Don't you dare bully me.

JACQUELIN [panting]. You—

PSYCHE. And don't you dare bully *her*—poor darlin'.

JACQUELIN [*pushing her away*]. Get out, I tell you. Get out.

ANITA [*to PSYCHE, gently*]. Do go, Molly. It's good of you, I know. But I can manage quite alone with Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN. Oh, can you!

PSYCHE. You can't! You can't. You're too new at the game.

ANITA. I'd sooner, really. There's a dear. Go!

PSYCHE. Awright. Only 'e's a devil. Remember, a devil.

JACQUELIN. You shut up.

PSYCHE. Shan't, unless I choose.

[*She goes off by the door left, slamming it behind her.*

JACQUELIN. There! You see what you're doing, with your behavior—turnin' the whole place into pandemonia.

ANITA. I'm sorry. I'm sure I didn't mean to, Mr. Jacquelin. I'm very sorry.

JACQUELIN. Sorry don't mend matters much, does it?

ANITA. I can't do more than apologize. And if there's anything else you want to say to me, Mr. Jacquelin—— [*Hesitating.*] Oh, would you mind very, very much putting it off till to-morrow morning?

JACQUELIN. Putting it off? Why? What's the idea?

ANITA. Well, you promised me I could go home early to-night, didn't you?

JACQUELIN. I promised you?

ANITA. Yes, the first thing this morning. I didn't tell you the reason then, but it's really very serious. The fact is my mother's very bad, Mr. Jacquelin. There's something wrong with her heart.

[JACQUELIN *laughs.*]

I'll come earlier to-morrow, sir, if you like, only the doctor said he'd be there at seven. And a doctor costs a lot of money, Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN. Well, if that don't beat everything! You kick up a row, and then you come and ask a favor on top of it. D'you know what you are? You're a comic! That's the only word for you. A downright comic!

ANITA. But you told me this morning I could go. I telephoned the doctor in consequence.

JACQUELIN. On *my* telephone, I suppose?

ANITA [*faintly*]. Yes.

JACQUELIN. Haven't you been told not to use the telephone for your private affairs? Haven't you?

ANITA. I'll give you the twopence, Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN. Oh, twopence! Twopence ain't the point! It's your disobedience to orders—that's the point. The way you refuse to knuckle down to business.

ANITA. I've done everything else you told me. Everything.

JACQUELIN. Everything? What about just now? Were you pleasant to a certain gentleman? Were you even halfway decent?

ANITA. That isn't a thing that's expected of us, Mr. Jacquelin. You know it isn't.

JACQUELIN. Oh, isn't it? You'll find out there's a good deal more expected of you in this business than you expect's expected of you. [*He turns his back on her and sees the table standing near the door left. Going over and giving the table a push, he calls out.*] Miss Sylvia! Miss Sylvia!

SYLVIA'S VOICE [at some distance behind the curtains]. Yes, Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN [shouting]. What's this table doing here? Haven't I told you till I'm fair sick of it that this passage is to be kept clear?

[SYLVIA appears between the curtains. She has on her hat and jacket ready to go home.]

SYLVIA. That table? You told us to put it there yourself.

JACQUELIN. Now don't you come it over me with anything like that.

SYLVIA. You did, indeed, Mr. Jacquelin. This morning. When you were draping that brocade on Anita. You ordered us to pop the table behind the curtain and not to touch a thing on it. You remember, sir.

JACQUELIN [*remembering perfectly, but annoyed at being in the wrong*]. No. I don't remember. And what the devil d'you want to go and say before those people that that was Dutch lace? Of course we know it's Dutch lace, me and you. But what does Dutch sound like when you can say Venetian? Another time you keep your mouth shut when I'm—

[*The telephone rings behind the curtains.*]
See who that is!

SYLVIA [*going out to the telephone*]. Hullo! Hullo!
It's the Honorable Mrs. Walter Austin.

JACQUELIN. Herself?

SYLVIA. Yes.

JACQUELIN. Just bring the telephone stand up on the platform. I don't want to keep running up and

down like a rabbit. Besides—[with a look at ANITA]—I may be here for quite some time yet. [He rubs his hands.]

SYLVIA [behind the curtains]. The wire won't reach round the curtains.

JACQUELIN [going behind the curtain]. Oh, that'll do.

SYLVIA comes through the curtains again.

JACQUELIN [talks into the telephone outside the curtains. His back can be seen against the folds]. Yes, Madam? Late, Madam, yes. Just going home, Madam. Yes, very fortunate you caught me. By Thursday night? An evening dress? Well—you're in luck. Just had a Paris model over. Suit you to a T, Madam. Absolutely your style. Dignified—yes, very. What, Madam? Would you mind saying that again? [He is apparently listening to her.]

ANITA [in a whisper to SYLVIA]. D'you think I can go?

SYLVIA. Not till he tells you to.

ANITA [with suppressed agitation]. But he promised!

SYLVIA. I wouldn't kick if I was you! I used to, too, in the beginning—you don't gain a thing by it.

Not a thing. Only rows and tears and headaches the next day.

JACQUELIN [who has kept up a running string of "Yes, Madam," "No," "Quite so"]. Very well, Madam. The Paris model. To-morrow at eleven, Madam. [He rings off and comes back through the curtains. To SYLVIA.] The Honorable Mrs. Walter Austin. To-morrow morning. Eleven. Palm off that dress of Mrs. Collisson's on her. She'll never know. They ain't in the same set.

SYLVIA. Yes, Mr. Jacquelin. Is that all?

JACQUELIN. Just give a look round and see all the dust sheets are over the things. And then you can go.

SYLVIA. Very well, Mr. Jacquelin. Good-night.

[She goes off through the curtains.

JACQUELIN. Good-night.

ANITA. What about me, Mr. Jacquelin?

JACQUELIN. Well, what about you?

ANITA. May I go, too?

JACQUELIN. Go? No, my dear. I think we'll have a couple o' hours more, me and you! Just here behind these curtains. We'll go on with that gown. [He turns to the table and takes up some material there.]

ANITA. You don't mean it, Mr. Jacquelin.

JACQUELIN. Most certainly I mean it, Miss Anita. Get out of this dress quick and put on one of your pink silk slips. I'll have another shot at that tunic.

ANITA. But it's after closing time.

JACQUELIN. What of that? If it's after closing time for you, it's after closing time for me. Come along! Don't waste any more words.

ANITA [*after a pause—gently*]. Mr. Jacquelin. Please. I know you're annoyed with me. But can't you look at it from my point of view just for a minute? Don't you see that I couldn't—I couldn't accept advances from that man, Mr. Jacquelin?

JACQUELIN. What man?

ANITA. You know—Sir Charles.

JACQUELIN. Then have the decency to say Sir Charles. I won't have my customers talked about disrespectfully, d'you hear?

ANITA. They bring it on themselves if they behave as they do.

JACQUELIN. Don't you talk about behavior. Putting on all the airs of a saint, when you know jolly well you'll take up with the first little squirt that happens to tickle your taste on a Saturday afternoon.

ANITA [*with dignity, but a good deal of anger*].

You've got no right, Mr. Jacquelin, to insult a girl for keeping her self-respect.

JACQUELIN. I have a right to do what I damn please in my establishment. D'you understand me? And I'm not going to be told what I can do or can't do by a miserable twopenny pair of stays like you. What? Come here and beg to be taken on and then start and tell me what's right and what's wrong? I'll teach you, my young miss. I'll break you—before I get done with you. See if I don't.

ANITA. You're mistaken there. Some of us don't break; some of us that happen to be brought up decently. You see we aren't all of us ready to fling ourselves at you, body and soul.

JACQUELIN. Who asked for your body? I don't want your scraggy, measly body. I can get as many as ever I like of your sort; yes, and more, too, thank you.

ANITA [*quietly, after a moment*]. I think I'd better go, Mr. Jacquelin. And for good. I shan't be here to-morrow.

JACQUELIN. Oh, no, you're not. We're going to work.

ANITA. I'm not. You can't make me work overtime. If you try to, the first thing in the morning I shall lodge a complaint against you.

JACQUELIN. Do! And I'll pay my fine. That'll be the end of it as far as I'm concerned. But what about you, miss? Eh?

ANITA. I shall get work elsewhere in time.

JACQUELIN. Will you? What about your references? Where are you going to get work when there are thousands ready and willing to work who don't lodge complaints and give away their employers? Thousands, just as young as you and pretty as you. So you see, my dear, you see.

ANITA. Good God! And this is what we women are born to—we that have to earn our living! Slaves! Worse than slaves. Of no more value than the dirt under our feet.

JACQUELIN. Precisely. Cattle! You're so much cattle. Nothing more or less. And all your votes you're shouting about, and all the laws you want to pass, they won't make a jot of difference. As long as there's a glut of you females in the market, we've got the whip hand. And I for one won't let go the whip—trust me for that.

ANITA. I didn't know any human being could be so utterly shameless.

JACQUELIN. Shameless? Not at all. That's power. Power, my dear. Look here. Let me tell

you something. When I'd made my first sixpence, I turned round and kicked the man with a penny in his pocket. That's the way I've climbed up in the world. And that's the way I'll go on, by God! Kicking as long as there's a kick left inside o' me. [The telephone rings.] And there's a good few still in these legs o' mine—make no mistake. [To the telephone.] Yes! Yes! Yes! [He goes behind the curtains again. ANITA, shaken by the interview, crosses to the table and leans her back against it, closing her eyes wearily. JACQUELIN meanwhile telephones; his back is plainly discernible through the folds of the curtain.]

JACQUELIN. Hullo! Hullo! Yes. Oh, it's you, Tommie, dear boy! Go to one of the Halls to-night? Awf'ly sorry. No, I can't. Got to work and more besides. Usual thing. Pulling one of my girls into shape. Obstreperous? Yes, a bit. They're all like that at first, poor darlings! Same old story. Yes. All pay and no work. Must get home. Dying mother and all that!

ANITA [breathless with indignation]. Mr. Jacquelin!

JACQUELIN [at the telephone]. What? Yes! Ha! Ha! Of course! Ma's real name's Algy or Reggie, of course. And she's waiting in some private bar

off Leicester Square with a waxed moustache and a five shilling piece! Yes! Ha! Ha!

ANITA [*trembling with rage*]. Mr. Jacquelin! You've no right! My mother!—

JACQUELIN [*down the telephone*]. What do you say? [*Very patronizingly.*] Yes, yes. Only a matter of a week or so, and she'll be eating out of my hand. What? Certainly. Pass her on to you? Certainly. Whenever you like. Ta, ta, old boy. Sorry. Bless you!

[ANITA, *shaking from head to foot, has lost all control of herself. In her agony she has taken up the large dressmaker's shears which are lying on the table. During JACQUELIN's last insult, she looks down at them in her hand and suddenly, just as he is evidently going to return, she opens them and plunges one of the blades through the curtains into what she judges to be his shoulders. She has aimed well. The scissors stick in the curtain. She stands horrified, her hands to her open mouth. From behind the curtain comes only one short cry "Christ!" The scissors fall down suddenly. The curtains sway violently, as of some one trying to clutch at them; then there is*

an ominous thump—and a faint groan. ANITA instinctively raises the curtain. She drops it again quickly, but JACQUELIN's feet and legs, halfway to his knees, protrude. He is evidently lying on the floor behind the curtain.]

ANITA [hysterically]. Why don't you kick! You've kicked your way up. You said there were still a few good kicks left in those legs of yours. Well—why don't you—— Why don't—— [She begins to scream with hysterics.] Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ah! [The telephone begins to ring again.] Ah ha! Ha! Ha! [The telephone rings again.] Ah!

[The scene vanishes. The telephone goes on ringing and ringing till the next scene slowly lights up.]

SCENE III: *The Boudoir.* Same scene as the first scene of Act I. The telephone is heard to ring several times. Gradually the glow of the fire begins to light up the room. ANNE is seen lying asleep as at the end of the first scene of Act I. She wakes up with a start and turns on the lights; then goes to the telephone murmuring: "To wake me up like this."

ANNE [taking off the receiver]. Yes? Yes, Baker. Didn't Léonie tell you I was lying down? Well—

what is it? Who wants to speak to me? Oh, Sir Charles. Yes, of course I'll speak to Sir Charles. . . . Oh, is that you, Sir Charles? Disturb me? I'm most grateful to you. I was having a most beastly dream! No! No! You want to tell me a secret? I think I can guess it—I can't? I'm to swear not even to tell my husband? Oh, I couldn't do that. Only for to-night. Yes—but what is it? Swear first. Well, there. There, I swear. What? You've got John the post? *The post*— Oh, Sir Charles, you really are too wonderful. My husband to thank me for it? Nonsense! Oh, no, I wasn't! [Coyly.] I wasn't delightful at all to-day. Just my poor, stupid self, that's all! What? Mrs. Collisson? Lost her temper? Really? Not an invalid at all? Come! I won't believe it! Now! Now! She's a dear, really. I hate to think of her being so disappointed! With her delicate health, too. No—I promise you. Not a word to my husband. Not a word. *Of course* you want to tell him yourself, naturally. But it's most sweet of you to let me know first—so like you—so exactly like you—

LÉONIE enters the room from door left.

LÉONIE. Ah, Madame est réveillée?

ANNE [*into the telephone*]. Here's some one! Yes—punctually—quarter past eight. Yes. Yes. [Coyly.] Oh, now, Sir Charles! Now! Now! Now! I'll have to ring off if you go on like that! [She laughs again.] Ha! Ha! No! I'm going to ring off. There, now! [She hangs up the telephone.] Got it! Got it! Got it!

LÉONIE. Madame, veut-elle que je prépare son bain?

ANNE. Yes, get the bath ready at once. What time is it?

LÉONIE. Just past seven.

ANNE. How long have I slept?

LÉONIE. Madame has not sleep 'alf an hour.

ANNE. Not half an hour? [*As in a dream*.] It can't be!

LÉONIE. Regardez, Madame! [*She points to the clock*.]

ANNE [*her hand over her eyes*]. Half an hour! [LÉONIE goes off into the bathroom. Staring before her.] All that——? In half an hour? [There is a knock on the door left.] It does seem strange! [Another knock. Hearing the knock.] Yes?

JOHN'S VOICE [*outside*]. Are you awake?

ANNE [*on the defensive*]. No! I'm asleep!

[JOHN enters rather contritely. *He wears his dressing-gown.*]

JOHN. Let me come in, will you?

ANNE [*with a surprised smile*]. I'm not sure whether I like cave men walking about my boudoir.

JOHN. My dear—I couldn't go on dressing—I—I've been thinking things over—I don't know what was the matter with me before. It's that rotten jealousy of mine.

ANNE. I've been thinking things over, too, John. I shouldn't have played on your jealousy as I have. It was quite wrong of me.

JOHN. No, no, my dear—

ANNE. Yes, it was. And I've decided—seriously decided—I shan't make eyes at old Sir Charles to-night. [*Her hand on the telephone.*] I promise you I shan't. I'll be most correct—most matronly, as becomes the mother of your children.

JOHN. You make me feel a fool now.

ANNE. No, my dear, no. I agree with you. You must get your post by yourself—by direct, honest means. And somehow I feel you will get it, John—without any nonsense on my part. Something tells me you will. And you know a woman's instinct—

JOHN. My darling! There never was such a wife as you!

ANNE. Nonsense! I'm sure there are tens of thousands!

[*The water is heard to run in the bathroom.*

She goes over to the dress.]

And I don't think I'll wear this dress either. In fact, if I could return it—exchange it—

JOHN. My darling! What's happened to you?

ANNE. You see I had such a strange dream. Or rather not like a dream—they were glimpses—glimpses of all those lives that go to make a flimsy thing like that. The awful struggles for existence! And you were in it somehow—tender sometimes, and sometimes brutal—and I was in it, too. And yet we weren't ourselves and yet we were—and everybody was pushing, fighting, hating, loving—in one endless battle.

JOHN. I told you I didn't like the idea of those headache powders! I'm sure they're too strong.

ANNE. Oh, it was more than mere headache powders this—I'm sure. I feel quite queer about this dress now. To think of the sickening expenditure of human energy it stands for—

JOHN. But so does everything stand for an awful

expenditure of human energy—everything we eat and wear and use—and throw away.

ANNE. John, that's a terrible thought—

JOHN. Dearest! If one begins to think at all—

ANNE. Do you believe the world will ever be better? We'll ever outgrow this grind, grind, grind?

JOHN. You're full of philosophy to-night, aren't you?

ANNE. Philosophy? It's something more than philosophy, John. It's— [She turns to him passionately.] Oh, my love! Hold me close! Let me forget. [She is in his arms.] Or, rather, John, you and I, once you have your post, let's try and do our share somehow, shall we? Try to help them along a little—those workers—help them to get away from—from—

JOHN. From the cave-dwelling days?

ANNE. Yes. The cave-dwelling days—

[They embrace. Giving a little laugh.]

Ha! I'll wear my dress now. It'll make me remember.

LÉONIE reënters.

LÉONIE. Le bain est prêt, Madame.

ANNE. My bath! We must get ready, John.

[JOHN tries to embrace her.]

No! No! No!

JOHN. My darling, we've still got half an hour—

[She pushes him gently away with her hand.

He takes it and kisses it. Giving in.]

Oh, very well. Go and have your bath.

ANNE [with a smile]. John!

[They nod to each other. He goes off to the hall,

she to the bathroom, twisting up her hair.]

CURTAIN

PS 3521 .N63

Knoblock, Edward, 1874-1945.

My lady's dress



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